CBW

Number One For PCV Professionals

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1st with the news every Wednesday

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No 10 Online Madness

So the Downing Street pay-as-you-drive online petition now has 1.5 million signatures. Wow! And, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, our notoriously computerphobic Prime Minister will be 'emailing everyone who signed the petition'. It's an aside, but I have this wonderful vision of Mr Blair slaving away one-fingered typing his 'personal' replies. Though, I guess more realistically, a lackey will simply be hitting 'reply all' and adding to the world's spam problems!

I suppose 1.5 million emails is quite impressive, though I'm not sure how impressed I'm supposed to be. In a country where two million people can be bothered to phone Channel 4 (at a cost) to vote Jade Goody out of Big Brother, what's the true meaning of 1.5 million people saying no we don't want to monitored by big brother, to pay for using the roads, to buy a £600 black box, or whatever scare story the unreconstructed petrolheads are using to bait the public.

It's just nimbyism isn't it: 'I've earned the right to zoom down clear roads above the speed limits and if there's a great big traffic jam that must be dealt with in some way that doesn't affect me'.

I got stuck in a jam last week. A single caravan had overturned on the M1 and I, and a few thousand other people, including many coach operators, lost an hour. The roads are full. And public transport doesn't truly yet provide an alternative (and neither does cycling or walking or anything else). Transport has always suffered from a dearth of conviction. People have been talking about an integrated transport policy for about a million years.

But why is it with transport that nimbyism is so successful? The petition has been front page news all week. Why? It just pushes the real issues to the background. If you want to fix transport in the UK you will need to spend a vast amount of money and vastly alter people's perceptions of what their 'rights' are. And to get the cash you're either going to have to raise taxes or charge the road users. There is no alternative. There hasn't been for years. I'm a long way from being a tree-hugger. And, truth be told, I like driving my car as much as the next person. But, I travel slowly on the roads because they're full of other cars. I very rarely cycle anymore because the roads are just so busy. My average car speed in London is less than half what I could achieve on my bike. When I catch a bus it crawls through areas of London because of car traffic and badly parked cars. There are 33 million of them on the roads. Up 14 million since 1981.

It's a tough call isn't it? We're mostly (I would guess) car users and something else. We drive and use buses. Drive and cycle. Drive and catch trains. But it's the cars, our cars, that are messing it all up. The online petition is a pointless, back-firing PR exercise. Sign it don't sign it... who cares. We have a problem on our roads and it's about time we did something about it.

Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

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Perception change on the agenda

CTC to look at industry PR campaign

The Coach Tourism Council will look at co-ordinating an industry-wide 'perception change' marketing campaign after a substantial proportion of delegates at last weekend's Bonded Coach Holiday conference said they would contribute their own money.

CTC chief executive Chris Wales called for an ad-hoc vote after the issue was raised in a speech by Excelsior Coaches' boss Ken Robins.

CTC chairman Sean Taggart said the vote provided the "basis for further discussions".

Mr Robins' speech - previewed in an interview with *CBW* last November - called for a marketing/advertising campaign aimed at changing consumer's attitudes towards coach holidays.

He argued that the current generation of traditional coach passengers are turned off the industry because of its too close association with the 'older' market.

He calls for the CTC and BCH to club together to co-ordinate the campaign and for operators to contribute to a common fund. His comments provoked some lively debate from delegates at the sold-out event, held this year at the Queen's Hotel in Bournemouth (for a full report see page 64).

Opinion was roughly split between those who thought it was a good idea and those who either disagreed, or thought the industry should try another tack. But many agreed that bringing the subject up had made for a lively and enjoyable conference.

Also speaking at the conference was Richard Eberhardt, president of RDA - International Coach Tourism Federation - and boss of German coach operator Eberhardt Reisen. He revealed that the access charges mooted for Venice had been reduced from over €400 per day, to €220 after negotiations between the RDA and Venice authorities.

DfT gets a kicking

The DfT's performance against its own targets is poor and it lacks a clear strategy, according to the Transport Select Committee.

The committee's routine examination of the DfT's annual report, published last week, was less critical than last year but will still make uncomfortable reading at DfT headquarters.

The report begins with: "The nation must be able to see a clear strategy, and this must be supported by a programme of detailed policies which will ensure it is delivered. Our examination suggests the DfT still has some way to go." It then launches into particular failings.

Top of the list is the DfT's performance against its own Public Service Agreements (PSA) targets. The report says: "The department's performance against the targets is poor; only two out of the seven are on course to be met," adding: "Failing against a road congestion target with such a weak ambition is in itself disappointing."

On congestion charging, the report says: "We seek reassurance from the DfT that the adoption of road pricing will not be an eligibility criterion for participation by a local authority in the statutory bus quality partnership schemes or quality contracts."

Evidence submitted to the committee says 60% of VOSA staff are considered 'in-scope' for outsourcing. "We would question the claim that it is not the DfT's intention to privatise VOSA," says the report, adding it has "serious reservations" about outsourcing testing and enforcement functions.

It also recommends the DfT looks at PCV driving tests to ensure quality standards are met, and that it should analyse the subsequent collision rates of drivers using different training regimes.

Conservative shadow transport minister, Owen Patterson, said: "There should be real questions asked about whether this department is capable of doing its job".

But the report was not all bad news: the committee "welcomes" the debate on road pricing and "congratulates" the DfT on meeting its road casualty reduction targets.

***The committee has also announced a new inquiry, into 'Ticketing on Public Transport'. Submissions are being invited by March 7, and should be confined to six pages and can be emailed to *transcom@parliament.uk*.**

David Cameron test drives an Ethanol-fuelled bus in Sweden

Cameron in the driving seat

Conservative Party leader David Cameron lead a high powered delegation on a visit to Sweden last week, stopping at Scania's Södertälje factory to hear about the company's environmental technology.

Mr Cameron and colleagues Oliver Letwin and George Osbourne were in Sweden to meet its prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, but were also shown around the factory by Scania's President and CEO Leif Östling.

After test driving several buses and trucks and following a presentation of the company's research programme on environmentally friendly buses, David Cameron said: "Thank you, Prime Minister, for asking me and my team to Sweden. Thank you also to Scania for hosting such an interesting visit. Scania are absolutely right: we face big environmental challenges and business very often has the answers in terms of technology and research."

The group heard about alternative fuels, but also heard about Scania's on-going hybrid research project, due to market in around five years time. Allied to diesel, ethanol or gas engines, Scania's hybrid is expected to reduce fuel consumption by over 25%.

Demonstrators held 'go-slow' protests and a march in London on Monday as the Congestion Zone was extended into the west of the city. Organised by the West London Resident's Association, a convoy of 50 cars snaked along the Earls Court Road, the boundary of the new zone. Observers said the protests were 'peaceful but loud'. (see page 36).

UK's oldest bus route to go

What is reputedly one of Britain's longest established bus routes is to be withdrawn. As part of a major shake up of services in the Burton and Swadlincote area, Arriva Midlands (AM) is to withdraw its route 112, which runs from Burton on Trent to Birmingham, via Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield.

***CBW* understands the route was originally introduced by Midland Red in 1912 to link Derby with Birmingham, and over the years has also been known as route X12.**

The move by AM forms part of a decision to recast the network in east

Changes to Britain's oldest route

Staffordshire and south Derbyshire. However, the company will continue to operate the Burton to Lichfield section of the route by combining it with route 812. The two routes currently depart Lichfield for Burton on the hour and at 13 minutes past the hour, leaving a gap of 47 minutes between buses. The re-numbered routes, 7 and 7A, will operate every 30 minutes on the hour and at half past the hour, giving the public an improved service and hopefully increasing ridership.

As for the remainder of the route, having already operated a service linking Chasetown with Sutton College, Central Connect has decided to operate the Sutton Coldfield – Lichfield leg commercially during the day. Operations Manager Steve Elms told *CBW*: "Once we knew Arriva were withdrawing the 112 as a through service, we decided to run that leg commercially during the day.

"We have quite a presence in Lichfield and are looking to increase it," added Mr Elms.

The Central Connect service starts on Monday March 26, the AM service finishing on Saturday March 24.

The Sutton to Birmingham section is already served by Travel West Midlands as part of its key 'Sutton Lines' corridor.

***CBW* understands that through buses have been hit by competition from rail, which offers quicker, more direct journeys. The Birmingham to Lichfield corridor alone is served by four trains an hour.**

Fifty operators and ten suppliers have signed up to this year's Coach Rally in Brighton – but there is still some space available. The event has moved forward a week – to April 14-15 – to avoid a clash with the start of Plaxton's 100th anniversary celebrations, but the Scarborough manufacturer will be there, as will Setra, Volvo, East Lancs, Dawson Group, BASE, Esker and Bob Vale. Accommodation will be at the Hilton Brighton Metropole, but the Dinner will be a cosier affair, with a limited amount of tickets available. For more information contact the organisers Ann and Paul Cousins on 01753 631170 or *ann@coachdisplays.co.uk*.

Bus death inquest's verdict

An inquest in Birmingham heard that pedal error was probably to blame for a bus shooting forward and killing a woman last year.

Susan Oliver died at the scene when she was struck by the Travel West Midlands single-decker at Marston Green bus terminus on August 29, 2006.

The coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death.

The court was told the driver, Keith Jackson, had driven to the terminus where he had partly pulled in and was talking to a colleague. A bus pulled in behind and the driver sounded his horn. Mr Jackson's bus, whose engine had been idling, then "shot off like a rocket" according to one witness. The bus struck Mrs Oliver, who was standing directly in front of it, and carried on for 10 yards before stopping.

Tests failed to reveal any mechanical fault. The court also heard evidence that irregular pressure had been put on the brakes, with another witness describing the brake lights flashing. Police say papers have been sent to the DPP, but no decision had been made.

Chester back in High Court

Legal action against Arriva started in the High Court this week, with Chester City Council claiming that competitive service registrations are designed to upset the sale of 80-vehicle Chester City Transport. The action is being brought under the Competition Act 1998 on the basis that Arriva was using its financial strength and market dominance in the operation of bus services in the area to engage in anti-competitive action, prior to the sale of the company.

The High Court hearing had been scheduled for December 11, but was adjourned after Arriva altered its registrations substantially. Arriva was adjudged to bear all the costs of adjournment, and denied leave to appeal against the decision. Original registrations lodged by Arriva had mirrored all of CCT's commercial routes and required 23 buses, but these were cancelled and replaced by new registrations on only three services requiring 11 buses, but these cannot now start until the outcome of the hearing is known. The CCT sale process has been halted temporarily, pending the outcome.

Briefly

Arriva has denied reports it is planning to sell its Scottish bus operations to McGills. The company previously sold part of its holdings to the group in 2001 and was reportedly considering selling the remainder to the company too. But a spokesman for the company rubbishes the reports saying: "It's not true. We're not looking to sell it, and have not sold it."

The Association of Local Bus Company Managers (ALBUM) Conference will be held on May 15-16 at the Marriot Worsley Park, junction 13 on the M60. The event is being hosted and organised by Warrington Borough Transport – contact *gina.dale@warringtonboroughtransport.co.uk* or call 01925 634296.

According to the *Manchester Evening News*, councils in Greater Manchester are holding on to £4m of concessionary fares grant. GMPTA announced rises in concessionary fares two weeks ago after being forced to pay an extra £3.4m to operators. The ten councils receive nearly £26m from the Treasury, but pass only £22m onto GMPTA.

As the Highways Agency consultation on motorway service areas closes, Freight Transport Association chief executive Richard Turner says that schemes should be planned in when the road itself is being planned. "No one would build a house without a toilet so why are we still seeing roads without proper driver facilities?" he says. He also says the highway authority should have the responsibility for including such facilities.

The Wales and Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain is calling for free bus passes and TV licences for the poor, as part of a 'war on inequality'. Mr Hain is in the running for the Labour deputy leadership when Tony Blair leaves Number Ten. Last week he also called for City workers to donate two-thirds of their bonuses to charity.

Briefly

Disappointingly, the My Space website profile for London Traffic Commissioner Peter Hendy turns out to be a fake. London papers went large on the story last week although how they could possibly have spotted it so quickly is unexplained. The page was becoming increasingly popular with the teenagers who typically use My Space, achieving almost cult status apparently. 'Check it out' at www.myspace.com/peterhendy

YourNextBus – an interactive timetable service for mobile phones – was launched on every bus in South Yorkshire on Monday. The system uses GPS satellite technology to pinpoint the location of every bus and gives accurate location information to waiting passengers. The service provides information on the next four buses, including whether they are low floor.

Edmonton's new bus station was officially opened last Friday. The new station in Edmonton Green, in the London Borough of Enfield, will handle 120 buses an hour on 13 routes and expects to serve five million passengers per annum. The facility is the first development to come out of the eight-year planned regeneration of the area by St Modwen Properties.

An investigation is underway after a First bus caught fire on East Main Street in Whitburn on Friday morning. *CBW* understands there were no passengers on board at the time. Extensive damage has been caused to the engine and rear half of the bus.

A car travelling at up to 80mph crashed into a bus, two cars and a garden wall at 06.10hrs on Monday morning. Police believe the Ford Focus was trying to overtake the Travel West Midlands route 401 Bilston-West Bromwich single decker on Brierley Lane, Bradley. The motorists remonstrated with the bus driver before fleeing the scene.

Go-Ahead steam ahead

Increased turnover and profitability for bus division

Bus and rail operations of the Go-Ahead Group showed a vastly improved performance in the latest set of interim results released this week. Full year results declared last summer showed a downturn in profitability and a cut in operating profits for the first time, with the final retained profit falling by nearly 6% to £64.2m, but the new set of figures shows a good turnaround.

Chairman Sir Patrick Brown said that the outlook for the second half of the year remained positive with expected increases in bus profitability sustained by a combination of margin improvement, revenue growth and contributions from new acquisitions. Commenting on the poor results of the aviation services division, he said that "performance is expected to recover in the next financial year as the benefits from this year's commercial developments are secured."

Interim results for the six months ended December 30, 2006 show that the group's total turnover grew 35% from £676m to £915m, and group operating profits, after exceptionals and amortisation costs rose 17% from £43.7m to £51.2m. Once again, more than half of the group's profits came from bus operations, even though they contributed only 28% of total revenue.

The three acquisitions by the group are no longer listed separately, as it is said that their contributions were immaterial. Thus the scenario in Birmingham, where last year's acquisitions delivered further losses is not spelt out in the separated activities of the purchases, even though Docklands Minibuses was purchased for £3.1m as far back as September, and Marchwood Motorways came for £3.7m in October. The third purchase was of PAS Gatwick in December, which provides valet parking, for a cash consideration of £1.5m.

The Group's pre-tax profits were up 14% at £46.9m compared with £41m a year ago, and after various deductions, the retained profit for the half-year rose 16% to £35.2m from £30.3m.

Revenue in the bus division rose 13% to £259.5m from £224.6m, but the operating profit rose far more, by 27% to £29.2m, partly due to a decrease in fuel prices, and also partly due to increased London operations. Revenue in the rail division rose 72% from £315.3m to £540.9m, with the operating profit rising 31% from £19.6m to £25.6m but with a margin cut from 6.2% to 4.7%. A small downturn in revenues in the aviation services division produced a far bigger decrease in profit, as improvements of the past were lost for a variety of quoted reasons - such as terrorist threats, warm autumn (less de-icing), more hold baggage (security concerns), and airport closures (bad weather). Revenues in the division fell 11% from £138.7m to £123.6m, but the operating profit fell 89% from £3.7m to £0.4m producing a margin of just 0.3%.

SUMMARY

	Six months ended 30 December 2006 £m	Six months ended 30 December 2005 £m	Year ending 30 July 2006 £m
Group Revenue	**915.2**	**675.9**	**1,463.6**
Total net operating costs	**(864.0)**	**(632.2)**	**(1,374.1)**
Operating profit	**51.2**	**43.7**	**89.5**
Pre-tax profit	**46.9**	**41.0**	**83.6**
Retained profit	**35.2**	**30.3**	**64.2**
Net Assets	**122.6**	**101.4**	**109.3**
DIVISIONAL RESULTS			
UK Bus:			
Turnover	**259.5**	**224.6**	**474.6**
Operating profit	**29.2**	**23.0**	**46.7**
UK Rail:			
Turnover	**540.9**	**315.3**	**748.5**
Operating profit	**25.6**	**19.6**	**42.5**
Aviation services:			
Turnover	**123.6**	**138.7**	**263.7**
Operating profit	**0.4**	**3.7**	**8.6**

Good news for First in York

Punctuality Improvement Partnerships will be on the agenda at a York City Council meeting later this month.

Dominant local operator First Bus has long called for the widespread introduction of PIPs, saying they are the most effective arrangement in the current legislation to ensure reliable bus services.

"More reliable and quicker bus services can achieve higher occupancy levels, therefore reducing the cost to operators, which may be passed on to customers in terms of lower fares," said Julie Hurley, head of Transport Planning.

Green Councillor Andy D'Agorne said: "Improved punctuality would be welcome, but is largely dependent on council action to deliver bus priority measures."

However, Labour Councillor Tracey Simpson-Laing said: "The Government is introducing important legislation which will give local authorities power over local bus companies, which will allow us to make real changes."

*** Independent research carried out on behalf of First Bus in York has shown an 87% satisfaction rating amongst FTR passengers. High ratings were also achieved for aspects such as vehicle cleanliness and information quality.**

However, ticket machines, the ease of buying a ticket and the length of time customers had to wait for an FTR received much lower ratings.

Students from Durham University's rowing club have warmed-up for the new season by helping to launch Go North East's Prince Bishop Swift service. The new route will take to the road next Monday and differs from the existing Prince Bishop route 20 in that it will run limited stops between Durham and Sunderland as the X20. The students managed to pull the bus a distance of 20 metres in 17.8 seconds.

Iddon in at First EC

First's Peter Iddon

Peter Iddon, formerly Engineering Director at First Eastern Counties, has been promoted to the position of Managing Director with immediate effect.

Nicola Shaw, Managing Director of First's UK Bus division, said: "I am very pleased to promote Peter. His wide ranging experience of the public transport industry, together with his track record of delivering improved performance, makes him the ideal candidate to lead the team at Eastern Counties."

Commenting on his appointment, Peter said: "In the time I have spent here, I have come to realise that Eastern Counties has a tremendous future, with lots of potential."

Peter has spent his whole career in the road transport industry. Having trained as an engineer, he has held various supervisory and management roles, including Depot Engineer at Ribble Motor Services, Fleet Engineer at Shearings Holidays, Engineering Director for Blackburn Transport and Senior Engineer at Travel West Midlands.

Peter joined First in February 2003, initially as Engineering Director at First Manchester West. In September 2003, he transferred to First Potteries, where he was part of a team tasked with improving the engineering performance of the company. In June 2006 Peter moved to First Eastern Counties to take up the role of Engineering Director.

Good move from A2Z Travel

An operator who has 'plugged the gaps' on two high-volume routes in the West Midlands says the experiment is going well. Walsall-based A2Z Travel says it is very pleased with the performance of routes 529 and 51. MD Shaz Ali told *CBW*: "The public have responded well to the increased level of service."

Mr Ali was keen to stress that the competition is not aggressive and that the company believes certain routes and corridors can be enhanced with the addition of higher frequencies.

Route 51, between Birmingham and Walsall, now has a combined Sunday frequency of every 7/8 minutes, whilst the Walsall-Wolverhampton route 529 enjoys a 10 minute frequency. The route 51 forms part of Centro's 'Showcase' scheme, and has benefited from the addition of bus priority measures.

Service cuts for Southdown

Southdown PSV says it has been forced to surrender two routes because the concessionary fares scheme has cut revenue. Two services, operated on behalf of Surrey County Council, will stop on March 12.

Operations director Gary Wood told *CBW*: "We won the tender to operate the routes last April. Regrettably, the revenue has not come up to our expectations and we have been left with no alternative but to surrender the contracts."

Steve Swain, Southdown's MD says. "Bus operators just aren't getting the reimbursement required from passes."

Briefly

Arriva is celebrating its one millionth passenger journey using PayPoint. Introduced across the UK in 2005, the scheme allows passengers to purchase weekly or monthly passes at their local shops. The partnership was first trialled by Arriva in Scotland in 2004 before being rolled out nationally in 2005. The millionth person got their ticket from a shop in Northumberland.

Dates for the highly successful Llandudno Transport Festival have been announced. This year's event will take place at Bodafon Fields over the Bank Holiday weekend of May 5-7. Up to 100 buses are expected to attend, with overall entry in excess of a thousand exhibits. Interested parties are asked to call 01492 545053 or visit the website *www.llantransfest.co.uk* .

Police are appealing for witnesses after a 32 year old Red Rose bus driver was attacked in the Crownhill area of Milton Keynes at around 1830hrs on Friday February 9. The attacker tried to buy a day pass, unavailable at that time of day, and refused to buy a ticket. When the driver attempted to call the Police, he was punched.

Buchanan Dial-a-Community Bus has offered placements to a group of Grampian Police cadets. The fortnight-long experience will help the cadets complete part of their developing community citizenship qualification.

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COACHES

Massive opposition to forced sell-off of Scottish joint venture

But Competition Commission says it's not for moving

The response to the Competition Commission's draft consultation on the Scottish Citylink/Megabus joint venture has been overwhelmingly against the forced divestment of services.

The Competition Commission plans to force the Stagecoach-Scottish Citylink joint venture to sell off some Saltire Cross services which last year saw a 41% increase in passenger numbers. The consultation on the draft proposal closed last week. Over 60 respondents - including many MPs and MSPs from all parties, local authorities, fellow bus and coach operators, trade unions and passengers - have written to the commission asking it to withdraw its proposal.

Helen Eadie, MSP for West Fife and former member of the Scottish Assembly Transport committee wrote: "Your decision is incorrect and not in the best interests of my constituents or Scotland, and I urge you to revisit and correct this decision before any lasting damage is done."

Passenger Donald MacRae wrote: "I urge you with the utmost gravity to reconsider the decision. After all, I use the network - how many individuals within the Competition Commission involved in reaching this decision actually do?'

CBW was unable to find a single response to the consultation that was in favour of divestment, although some do recommend some undertakings be applied.

Tom Wileman, managing director of the Stagecoach-Scottish Citylink joint venture, said: "It is clear that in every part of Scotland there is universal opposition and anger to the forced sale of part of the joint venture. This issue has united the political parties in Scotland and there is a consensus among a whole range of transport experts and the public that the commission has got it wrong. As many of the responses make clear, the proposals also run counter to the Scottish Executive's transport policy. For our customers' sake, we hope the commission's final decision puts passengers' practical transport needs before the economic theory found in university textbooks."

He claimed that the joint venture has already given the Competition Commission "wide-ranging" undertakings to guarantee service quality, which the CC said were acceptable. He also raised questions about the estimated £1 million cost of the inquiry. He says the joint venture will press ahead with the £6.5m investment in Plaxton/Volvo 15m coaches due in service by the end of this month as evidence of it 'putting the interests of our customers first'.

All the responses to the consultation can be viewed by going to *www.competition-commission.org.uk* and following the links.

Epsom Coaches now has four Setra 416 GT-HD tri-axle coaches in its fleet after taking delivery of two more last week. The Surrey-based firm underwent a re-branding exercise last year, electing to concentrate on the top end of the market for its coach charter and holidays business. Commercial director Steve Whiteway said: "We looked at our market position and adapted our fleet, product and marketing strategies accordingly. One of the keys to our success is the constant reinvestment in our fleet." Epsom's new Setras have specially designed seats with adjustable seat width, climate control, WC/washroom and servery.

TGM in new deal with OFJ

Tellings Golden Miller has announced a new deal with fellow Heathrow operator OFJ Connections.

TGM sold its Aircrews business to OFJ at the turn of the new year - now TGM has announced the purchase of 75% of OFJ's Ground Services engineering company from the OFJ Group.

TGM says the purchase fits with its strategy of diversifying into related areas. The Ground Services site will become a new group HQ and operating centre for its London coach division.

Stephen Telling, chairman of the company, commented: "This acquisition will resolve a number of issues for the group. It will allow us to fulfil our strategy of diversifying into activities related to our core business in particular contracted engineering and vehicle maintenance for the bus, coach and airline industries. It will also provide a new group headquarters together with state of the art engineering workshops and a centralised operating centre for our London operations."

OFJ Ground Services maintains and repairs OFJ Connection's fleet of 100 buses and coaches, plus the 27 vehicles transferred from TGM in January. When the deal is completed, the facility will take over maintenance for all 60 of TGM's London and Portsmouth vehicles.

In the year ended March 31, 2006, Ground Services' unaudited accounts showed that it had turnover of £457,105 and profit before tax of £23,668. Net assets as at March 31 were £767,742, but the business has expanded considerably since then. It was acquired by OFJ on May 10, 2006 following which a dividend of £725,000 was paid. Ground Services unaudited management accounts at December 31, 2006, show net assets of £0.1m and annual turnover in excess of £2m.

Western Greyhound to shorten routes

Cornwall's Western Greyhound, holder of the UK Bus Awards' Small Bus Operator of the Year title, has registered various changes to shorten many of its routes from Good Friday (April 6).

Most services on its extensive network will be shortened to under 31 miles (50 km), in order to comply with domestic drivers' hours regulations instead of EU regulations which apply to longer routes.

The company currently operates several long-distance services that provide through links across Cornwall but can be prone to delays, caused by the county's heavy traffic congestion in the summer months, across a wider area.

Routes such as the Plymouth-Liskeard-Bodmin-Newquay 593 (55 miles in 2.5 hours) and the Truro-Wadebridge-Camelford-Boscastle-Bude 594 (70 miles in three hours) will be broken up into shorter routes.

However, the year-round Newquay-Wadebridge-Camelford-Okehampton-Exeter 510 and the summer-only Newquay-Perranporth-Hayle-St Ives 557, two of the company's more recently introduced long-distance routes, will remain as through services.

Aftermath of the the fire that destroyed three vehicles

Fire hits Pats Coaches

Fire broke out at Pats Coach depot at New Broughton, Wrexham on the evening of Thursday February 8.

A driver from GHA Coaches, whose depot is located next door, passed the site at approximately 20.22hrs and noticed one of the vehicles was alight.

With the fire service having been alerted, by the time the owners arrived on the site five minutes later, all three coaches were alight. GHA's driver fortunately jumped in a vehicle and moved it.

"By the time we arrived, I jumped in our flagship '06 plate Scania Berkhof Axial coach, but by then the off-side panels had already been scorched."

Vehicles lost include a 29-seater Optare Nouvelle-bodied Mercedes, a 53-seater Plaxton Paramount and a Wright Handybus-bodied Dennis Dart.

The company has been touched by the offers of help and loan of vehicles and currently has two on loan - one from GHA and another from JO Travel of Ponciau, Wrexham.

"To be fair, we have had offers from several other operators, including one from Anglesey," said Mark Davies, a director of the firm. Police are still investigating the incident.

■ Eight coaches, virtually half of the fleet, have been destroyed in a fire at the depot of Lawns Coaches of Full Sutton, East Yorkshire. The fire at the garage in Bridlington Road started on Friday night and was well underway when fire fighters arrived. Police had to close the main A166 road for a while due to flames and heavy smoke blowing across the road. Fire investigation and police officers returned to the scene in daylight on Saturday to investigate the cause, which is believed to be arson.

Neighbours moan about new depot

Residents living near Dunn Line's new depot in Nottingham will report the city council to the local government ombudsman for ignoring its own concerns over noise pollution.

The resident's association has obtained internal council emails through the Freedom of Information Act showing council officers had misgivings about allowing the company to use the Beechdale Road site as a depot when Dunn Line first applied last February.

The company eventually moved into the depot last June, from Old Basford. The site has been in use for commercial vehicles since 1948, most recently as Nottingham Truck and Bus Hire, but residents say it was previously used in the day and not much at weekends, whereas Dunn Line now uses it around the clock as a depot with a licence for 160 vehicles.

An email sent to the pollution control department from planning asks for an assessment of the likely impact of the site, emphasising how keen the council was to maintain the employment. The company employs 370 staff across the East Midlands.

After a visit to the site in March the pollution control officer wrote: "I am concerned that if the site is used as a coach/bus depot by Dunn Line the local residents are likely to be caused a statutory noise nuisance and a justifiable complaint will be made to this section.

"Dunn Line offers tours which could result in coaches and buses leaving/arriving the site 24/7 365 days of the year. Thus there is a strong possibility the residents will suffer noise nuisance, for example vehicle noise, engine noise, air brakes, noise from employees, etc, during the early hours of the morning and at night. The other major concerns are noise and wash water from the bus washing plant."

Dunn Line was given permission to move in and expand the site's use but the council now says it is investigating whether any breach of the planning permissions has taken place. Veolia, parent company of Dunn Line, has told *CBW* it is waiting to see the outcome of the council's investigation.

Lodge Euro 4 to get new Michelins

Tyre change at Lodge Coaches

Lodge Coaches' brand-new 12.2m Setra S415 GT-HD - the first Euro 4 Setra in the UK - will also be the first to be fitted with Michelin's new X Coach tyres when it takes to the road on March 1.

Michelin makes bold claims for its new product saying it delivers 20% more mileage than its predecessor, and up to 15% more grip due to a unique 'regenerating' tread design.

Further, when two-thirds worn, it says tests show the new tyre has 15% more grip on snow or ice, and up to 10% more grip in the wet.

Robert Lodge, MD of Lodge Coaches, said: "Michelin is the dominant tyre brand across our fleet. The new vehicle will be used as the flagship of our UK and European holiday programme in 2007 and we look forward to seeing how the new X Coach tyres perform, both in terms of durability and enhanced grip."

Officially launched at Euro Bus Expo 2006, the X Coach 295/80 R22.5 X XD tyres have three-dimensional patented Double Wave sipes which make the tread block more rigid.

Clarkson driver denies charges

The 72-year-old driver of the Clarksons coach that crashed last year has denied driving without due care and attention.

Joe Gardner, of Barrow in Furness appeared before Lancaster Magistrates. The case has been adjourned to allow solicitors to attend and fix a trial date.

The coach was carrying 23 school pupils and three teachers when it overturned on the M6 on July 19 last year.

A teacher and a pupil needed surgery following the crash. At the time of the accident, it was claimed that grooves in the road caused by heavy lorries had been a contributory factor.

Briefly

GMPTE has launched a new kind of public transport surgery. Spokesman Jonathan Morgan told *CBW*: "Whilst the concept is nothing new, in the past they were tagged onto other public meetings with a limited time allocation. The dedicated sessions are now being held at central locations near the passengers themselves. For example, the surgery in Aston was held in a bus at the bus station."

The managing director of Stagecoach East is offering a £1,000 reward for information leading to the prosecution of thugs vandalising buses in Northampton. At a public meeting held last Friday, supported by local MPs, James Freeman held up a six-foot spike which had been hurled from a bridge, piercing a seat inside a bus. "Had someone been sitting in the seat, they would undoubtedly have been killed," he said.

First Group has submitted plans for a new £10m headquarters building in Aberdeen. It dropped a previous application elsewhere in the city and will now redevelop its existing site in King Street. Building will start in mid-2007 and will include many sustainability and energy saving measures. Work should finish by the end of 2008.

TfL's Travel Demand Management budget will increase to £30m next year, from £5.5m this year. TDM, or 'smart' travel planning, encourages people to use public transport for short journeys and has been successfully trialled in three boroughs this year.

Edinburgh Airport is considering RTPI in a bid to encourage more passengers to use public transport. Its new Airport Surface Access Strategy, released last week, shows the proportion using public transport has risen to 22% from 16% in four years. The new measures are designed to lift this proportion to 27%.

Optare's new 2007 bus range will be available for operator trials shortly says the company. The new Versa, Tempo and updated Solo are all available with either EGR or SCR Euro 4 engines, and a range of power ratings, axle ratios and transmissions. Style, says Optare, also comes as standard.

Dedicated schools services should relieve pressure on buses

School network for London?

Free bus travel for teens should be replaced with a separate school bus network say Conservative London Assembly members.

They have called on the Mayor and TfL to carry out a feasibility study into a free school bus scheme, taking children from their doors to the school gate.

Roger Evans AM, who proposed the motion said: "A school bus would reduce the number of cars in the road as parents would have a safe alternative to driving their children to school. It would also ease congestion on normal bus routes, freeing up capacity for commuters and other members of the public, and thus reduce anti-social behaviour on public transport." The motion was carried by a majority of 13 votes.

In a separate move on Wednesday, the Assembly backed the continued provision of free bus travel for children under 16 and for under 18s in full-time education in the Mayor's budget for the 2007/8 financial year. The motion was unanimously supported by Labour and the Lib Dems, and was opposed by the Conservatives.

No CCTV access for operators

Instances of disorder and anti-social behaviour are falling since CCTV was fitted to school buses, according to a report to Shropshire County Council's Young Persons' Scrutiny Panel – but operators are concerned that they have no access to the data.

A pilot scheme to fit cameras to four buses began in 2004. Following positive feedback from operators, schools and parents, the scheme has been extended as funding has permitted and now totals 27 vehicles.

Mike Ritzen, Senior Transport Officer at Shropshire County Council told *CBW*: "In the past, an incident could be hugely problematic to investigate, whereas there is no argument with CCTV."

The scheme uses one supplier, Stoke on Trent-based Active Cameras which has installed a four-camera digital system, writing direct to an on-board hard drive. If a problem arises, a council official visits the bus concerned and downloads the data onto a laptop.

Responding to operators' concerns, Mr Ritzen said: "My concern is that if we allowed operator access, and an incident involved a driver or one of their friends, there is a risk that the data could be wiped. However, control of the system may change in future, be it to a designated person at the school or at an operator's depot."

*** Shropshire County Council has defended the lack of seatbelts on some school buses in the county after parents campaigned to have them fitted. 23 of the 150 vehicles it provides are buses and six of these do not have seatbelts. "These buses travel slowly and are generally stopping and starting. It must be remembered that buses are much safer than cars," said Fred Ratcliff, Transport Co-ordination Manager. A scrutiny panel involving elected councillors will discuss the issue this Thursday.**

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DTp Number : 123467
Vehicle Make
Vehicle Type : 3 AXLE SEMI-TRAILER GVW : 38500kg

PASSED Don FIRST TIME

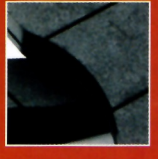
		BIND	TIME LAG	OVALITY	IMBALANCE	MAX.	FORCE	
AXLE 1 – 7188kg					1894kg		1894kg	(L)
					1859kg (1%)		1859kg	(L)
Service	N/S	Pass						
	O/S	Pass						
AXLE 2 – 7014kg					2352kg	(23%)	2352kg	(L)
					1811kg		1811kg	(L)
Service	N/S	Pass						
	O/S	Pass			2396kg	(26%)	2396kg	(L)
Parking	N/S				1773kg		1773kg	(L)
	O/S							
AXLE 3 – 6909kg		BIND	TIME LAG	OVALITY	IMBALANCE	MAX.	FORCE	
					2037kg		2037kg	(L)
					1859kg	(8%)	1859kg	(L)
Service	N/S	Pass						
	O/S	Pass			2175kg	(42%)	2175kg	(L)
Parking	N/S				1257kg		1257kg	
	O/S							

TEST SUMMARY
Measured Vehicle Weight = 21111kg

BRAKE SYSTEM		PASS	VALUE	TEST VALUE	RESULT
Service	:	45%	TAW	49%	PASS
Parking	:	16%	GVW	20%	PASS

**** OVERALL RESULT: PASS

Pass first time with Don



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Briefly

Edinburgh transport chiefs have cancelled parking fines totalling £6.5m because they were technically illegal. Parking tickets did not feature both the date of the offence and the date the ticket was issued, as they are supposed to under the law. The council does not plan to refund any money – but legal challenges from affected motorists may force it to.

Plymouth County Council gave away 4,000 free weekly bus passes last week. The tickets were handed out on a first-come first-served basis at a special roadshow in the city centre last Friday. Passers-by also entered a prize draw to win a year's free travel with Citybus or First, or free coach tickets from Target Travel.

Despite Stagecoach announcing a £400m return to shareholders in December, speculation continues to circulate that the eventual figure may be far higher. Broker Collins Stewart expects the company to return around £800m by increasing its debt to the same levels as other large transport companies.

The government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 website – see *www.treasury.gov.uk* – reveals that spending per head on transport is the sixth highest of any department. In 2005 – 06 spending per person was £8,720, of which £310 went on Transport. Top spending was on Health, at £1,490.

JMP Consulting is using the RTPI system in Dundee to plan effective bus priority measures. Three main corridors within the city, the A92 and A930 towards Arbroath and the A923 towards Coupar Angus, are being studied. Actual drive times between stops will be collected via the real-time information system to identify locations where periodic delays occur. These locations will be investigated and proposals made for bus priority measures that can be implemented over the coming year.

Pupils from Holyfield Primary school in Sutton Coldfield are the latest to benefit from LDV's Partnership Centre initiative. Some 700 children have been on factory tours in the last three months alone, learning skills that will help in maths and IT. Pictured: partnership centre programme leader John Farrell and pupils

January was a record-breaking month for LDV – the company shifted 553 Maxus, the highest number for seven years. Growth has been maintained since the company was taken over by GAZ Group last August. Production has gone from 150 vehicles per week then, to 235 per week now.

Tony Lewis, sales and marketing director, said: "January sales performance reflects the fact that demand for MAXUS Van and Minibus products has been exceptionally strong in recent months. We have had to increase our manufacturing line rates three times in the past six months. With rising demand and the introduction of 10, 12 and 17-seat minibuses in April, we are planning to further increase our manufacturing output."

LDV currently makes two versions of the minibus: 12-seat short wheelbase, and 15-seat long wheelbase.

Minister opens Clean Air Power's R&D facility

Leyland-based Clean Air Power officially opened its new 20,000 sq ft European research and development facility last week with a ceremony attended by Owen Patterson MP, the Conservative Shadow Transport Minister.

Clean Air Power markets Dual-Fuel technology, which enables large commercial vehicles to run on combined diesel and natural gas. It employs 30 people engaged in servicing the installation and technical needs of its European customers. Mr Paterson said he was a keen supporter of the Dual-Fuel project and believed it was a real option for operators to reduce carbon emissions and fuel usage.

He said: "With Dual-Fuel technology the transport industry already has a major weapon in the battle against climate change. I will continue to champion this work and offer my support to this revolutionary company."

The Leyland centre has the capacity to work on eight vehicles at a time and joins two other Clean Air Power facilities in San Diego, California and Melbourne, Australia. Over 1,600 vehicles around the world have already been converted to Dual-Fuel operation, which can reduce CO_2 emissions by around 25 tonnes and cut annual fuel bills by around £15,000 per unit.

John Pettitt, Clean Air Power's chief executive, said: "This new facility will enable us to develop our technology with vehicle manufacturers and operators around Europe.

"While the Government is looking to tax its way to reducing the UK's carbon footprint and operators talk constantly about emissions, we actually have a system that is already available and reducing impact on the environment.

"We have had strong interest from carbon-conscious companies across Europe."

Coroner calls for new safety measures

A Coroner has called for Lincolnshire County Council to introduce measures to improve the safety of children using its school buses.

The plea came at the end of an inquest into the death a 12-year-old schoolboy from Boston who was killed last summer when he stepped out from behind a bus into the path of a car.

Jake Hunt was thrown into a roadside hedge by the force of the impact and died soon afterwards.

After listening to three hours of evidence, Louth District Coroner, Stuart Fisher, urged the county council to review its procedures.

"It is essential to take note of the issues," he insisted. "They need to be raised at member level."

Eyewitnesses to the tragedy said that moments after alighting from the white Translinc bus, Jake and his elder brother, Aaron, were halfway across the road at the rear of their bus when tragedy struck.

Aaron managed to check himself in time, but Jake stepped into the path of an oncoming car.

The inquest heard from the driver of the bus, Trevor Carter, 64, who said he had been unaware of what happened behind his 53-seater - probably because engine noise and the vehicle's radio blocked out the sound of the impact.

Mr Carter said he had not been made aware of a condition in Translinc's contract, which obliged drivers to switch on hazard lights when pupils were joining or leaving the school buses.

Thecountycouncil'sheadof transport, Denise Carr, confirmed there was no policy to enforce this condition though other safety issues were addressed with pupils, parents and drivers.

Questions were also raised about whether Lincolnshire school buses should be painted in higher visibility colours. The council says the coroner's recommendations would be "considered".

The inquest heard that, as "an act of compassion" to Aaron, the school bus now pulled up at his house to save him having to cross the road.

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IRELAND

Death crash trial halted by "seriously flawed" evidence

The trial at Dublin's Circuit Criminal Court of Kenneth Henvey, the driver involved in the Wellington Quay accident that claimed five lives in 2004, was halted for a day after it emerged that technical evidence presented by the prosecution was "seriously flawed".

Kenneth Henvey (52) from Palmerstown in Dublin has pleaded not guilty to causing death by dangerous driving.

The jury was told by the judge that engine data figures presented by the prosecution had been "seriously inaccurate" after what he said he accepted was a "genuine error" made by an engineer from Volvo Bus. The judge told the jury it was a "serious matter", withdrew the inaccurate exhibit and gave the prosecution permission to reopen their case.

The jury heard that a Swedish Volvo engineer mistakenly sent inaccurate data supposedly taken from the bus involved in the incident to Gardai which was then used in evidence by the prosecution.

The court heard that Marcus Fasth of Volvo in Sweden had been evaluating data taken from the 12-litre engine of a more powerful South African bus while working on data from Mr Henvey's seven-litre engine bus and the figures "became mixed up" on Mr Fasth's laptop.

Mr Fasth travelled to Dublin to explain his mistake to the court. He told the jury he had never previously carried out two evaluations of bus engine data simultaneously and "unfortunately some numbers got mixed up". He said he was "very, very sorry".

The engine data resubmitted is at the centre of arguments between the prosecution, who argue that Mr Henvey made an unintended movement of the bus, and the defence, who say that there may have been a power surge causing the bus to leap forward.

Garda Adrian Tucker, who had earlier given evidence in relation to the inaccurate data, retook the witness stand to explain that Mr Fasth had first travelled to Dublin in December 2006 and downloaded electronic information from Mr Henvey's bus on to a laptop.

Garda Tucker said he received the data only days before the trial began and noticed that the number of engine operating hours and mileage quoted did not seem to tally with what he recalled from Mr Henvey's bus.

He contacted Volvo and was told that the data appeared to be correct and there would be "inconsistencies" in the figures. The new evidence submitted by Volvo has been questioned by an expert witness for the defence, who said that inconsistencies around engine mileage and hours operated still exist.

Dr Denis Woods, an expert in accident investigation, said the new figures showed the engine of the bus driven by Mr Henvey had experienced engine speed surges for 58 minutes and 31 seconds of its operating life.

He told the court that the engine could have experienced up to 60 seconds of abnormal operation without it showing up in the figures provided by Volvo. He said a power surge would last only two to three seconds.

Dr Woods said this called into serious question the accuracy of all the technical data downloaded from the bus.

In cross-examination, Dr Woods rejected suggestions that he was misreading the Volvo data or that he did not understand Volvo's engine control system.

He agreed there was no evidence that the bus had had a power surge on the day of the accident. But he said there was no evidence either that it had not.

Biofuel for over 3,000 CIE buses

Taoiseach Bertie Aherne has announced that all existing state-owned buses are to be modified to run on a 5% biofuel mix in the future, and that future deliveries must be capable of running on a 30% mix.

Ireland must undergo a "green energy revolution", he told a meeting of Fianna Fail's youth wing.

Unveiling a number of environmental measures including Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann's biofuel obligations, Mr Ahern also ruled out nuclear power as an answer to Ireland's energy needs.

Dublin Bus has already been trialling a biofuel mix in its sightseeing buses, but is now to be instructed by the government to extend the scheme to the entire 1,182-strong fleet.

Minister for transport, Martin Cullen, says this is a key step towards meeting Ireland's environmental goals. "It's very important given our emissions challenge over the next number of years that we begin to move this agenda forward," he said.

Bus Éireann's fleet of more than 2,000 vehicles (including schoolbuses) are also to be modified, although a firm deadline for completion of the project has not been set.

The Minister for natural resources, Noel Dempsey, had earlier announced that all vehicles should have to run on a 5.75 biofuel mix by 2009 and a 10% mix by 2020.

Mr Ahern also said that Mr Dempsey was finalising the White Paper on Energy, which would set a target to deliver one third of electricity consumed from renewable sources by 2020.

Going green in the Emerald Isle

Hero driver saves bus blaze pupils

The driver of a schoolbus which was completely destroyed by fire in Co Roscommon has been hailed as a hero.

John McGourty, of McGowans Coaches, evacuated the children as the fire started, and then got back into the blazing coach to move it away from the children and nearby houses.

The 23-year old coach was being operated under contract to Bus Éireann, as part of the National School Transport Scheme. It was traveling from north Roscommon to Drumshanbo at about 8.15am when the alarm was raised. Four students were on board as the bus pulled in to make its third stop of the day near Cootehall. As two students waited by the roadside, flames shot out from the front and rear of the bus.

School principal, Martin Fallon, said: "It was mainly due to the prompt action of the driver that all the students escaped without any serious injury."

Bus Éireann spokesperson, Erica Roseingrave, said the school bus had a full roadworthiness certificate. The contractor, "a long-established bus operator", ran a "reputable company", she said.

Gardai and Bus Éireann have launched separate investigations into the incident.

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Regional News

CBW* takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk

WALES

The highest village in Wales is in the midst of controversy over the lack of a bus shelter.

The previous shelter in Bwlchgwyn, Wrexham, was demolished in a road traffic accident and a replacement was erected by Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC). However, this was blown over in gale-force winds, and a replacement has not been forthcoming.

A spokesman for bus operator **George Edwards & Sons**, which serves the village, said: "In order to serve the local community, it would be nice to have a shelter. However, at the same time we recognise that the council only has a limited budget."

A council spokesman says they are still looking at funding arrangements.

MIDLANDS

The boss of **Stagecoach East** says he welcomes plans for a new interchange in Northampton but says it cannot replace Greyfriars bus station.

The council has revealed plans for a new rail station that will include a bus interchange, shops, offices, a hotel and houses on a 29-acre piece of land near the existing site.

Stagecoach East managing director, James Freeman, told the local *Chronicle & Echo*: "What worries me is that people equate the interchange at the rail station with a replacement for the bus station and these are completely different. The rail station is too far to the west of the town centre to ever be a central location for public transport in the town. The interchange is a wonderful thing - I have got nothing but praise for the idea - but it must not become an idea that this is a replacement for Greyfriars."

Greyfriars - voted the country's biggest eyesore in a BBC poll last year - has been earmarked for redevelopment for some years. But lack of agreement between the land's owner - Northampton Council - and the owners of the shopping centre of which it is a part - Legal & General - has delayed plans, as has the lack of a suitable alternative.

EAST

Norfolk councillors were accused of sexing up their bid for government money to start the **Norwich Orbital** bus service last week.

The council's scrutiny committee held a session on the failing service - due to be withdrawn next month, a year before its Urban Bus Challenge money was due to run out.

The committee was told the daily running cost was £450, as opposed to the £275 in the budget, and that passenger numbers were 175,000 in its first year, not 308,900 as predicted.

Adrian Gunson, cabinet member for planning and transportation, said: "Passenger numbers estimated in our forecasts were in the higher scale. However, had we adopted the more cautious approach, we wouldn't have got the money. Everybody who works with public transport knows that the estimated take-up of new bus services is far greater than the actual take-up once the bus service is running."

The head of the council's passenger transport unit said detailed planning of the scheme was outsourced to the council's partner, Mott Macdonald, and that the predicted passenger numbers were partly based on the numbers using the former City Circle service, scrapped in 1999. She says Orbital had failed because: "We were guilty of trying to run a service which was too many things to too many people."

■ A pair of schoolboys defied death when they fell through a bus window in Priory Road, Spalding, last Monday.

Emergency services were called after the two 13-year-olds from Gleed Boy's School fell through a rear nearside window of the **Brylaine Travel** single decker at 16.05. PC Martin Green of the Road Policing Unit said: "It could easily have been a double fatality, despite the fact that the bus was travelling slowly, and the youths landed on the footpath side of the road, rather than into the path of oncoming traffic."

The youths were treated for minor injuries and released the same evening. A police investigation is being carried out to find out what happened, while the vehicle will be examined by VOSA.

SOUTH WEST

Following in the footsteps of multinational advertising companies, a Cornish firm has offered to clean and maintain Newquay's bus shelters in return for advertising space.

The proposal came from **Fernbank Advertising** during last Wednesday's full meeting of the town council.

At the meeting, members voted to take over the upkeep of all the existing and any new bus shelters in the town after a request from Cornwall County Council. It is understood that taxpayers will benefit from more bus shelters under the scheme, saving the council a considerable sum, while also benefiting local businesses.

■ Two bus routes will be amalgamated into one to provide a new link between Paignton and Torquay.

Livermead-Preston Down-Paignton route 60 and Preston Down-Livermead-Torquay route 61are both operated by Chelston Leisure Services of Torquay (trading as **Dial-A-Bus**), an independent family-run minibus operator, using two lowfloor 25-seat Optare Solos, new in May 2006.

The routes serve hilly residential areas that in the main lie some distance off the commercial operators' main networks and also serve the new council-owned Occombe Farm tourist attraction, which opened in 2006, stopping directly alongside the visitor centre.

Following extensive work between the operator and the council over the past months, the routes will be revised to form a new through service from Monday March 19.

The new service will operate Monday to Saturday except public holidays, hourly between 08.45 and 17.00 except for a lunch break when there will be a two-hour gap. Services from Torquay will operate as service 60 and services from Paignton as service 61. A small fares increase will be implemented but is not expected to have much effect since most passengers hold Devonwide concessionary passes.

LONDON

The man at the centre of a racism case at Scotland Yard has been found guilty of assaulting a bus driver. Khawaja

Briefly

A Norwich bus driver has been found guilty of indecently assaulting teenage girls. Mark Clark, 40, was convicted on 12 charges last Thursday. The ex-First EC and Freestone Coaches driver - who had no previous convictions - denied the charges and will be sentenced on March 7. He was told to expect a custodial sentence.

Nobody was seriously injured last week when a Stagecoach minibus turned over on the A66 near Carlisle on Saturday. The driver and one passenger were taken to hospital for checks. The precise cause was unknown although the conditions were said to be snowy and icy.

Briefly

Lancashire County Council voted last week to retain its intra-county concessionary fares at their current level. A plan to increase the flat rate charge of 50p per journey to £2.50 or £5 had been discussed. The council says the scheme is very popular and it felt it was important to retain the single system to keep it simple for passengers.

The teenager who admitted setting fire to a Stagecoach 96 decker in Dartford in July has been given a 12-month referral order and fined £350. The decker was completely gutted in the blaze, which also damaged nearby houses. Another youth was given 12 months community service and ordered to pay £45 in costs last October for his part in the blaze.

A 77-year-old woman was trapped under a First Bus Dennis Dart in Portchester, Portsmouth, on Wednesday afternoon. The woman slipped as the bus pulled away and the right side of her body became trapped under a rear wheel. The driver carefully pulled away after she was discovered. She is recovering in hospital.

Uni-link has named one of its buses after founder John Waugh, who retired last year. The former transport manager at the University of Southampton received his belated retirement gift at a ceremony on February 14. He said: "When I retired, I asked for little fuss to be made, however staff and colleagues felt they wanted a lasting tribute to my involvement with Uni-link. They suggested a bus naming would be a fitting gesture, and I am happy to unveil the name and plaque which they have kindly donated." Mr Waugh, pictured left unveiling the bus, has been succeeded at Uni-link by Alec Gore.

Hasan, 30, launched a religious and racial discrimination case against the police after being dismissed from the force last year for disciplinary offences. Hasan attacked the bus driver in Shepherds Bush last July in a road rage incident. He allegedly spat at the driver and tried to grab him under the cab screen. His antics were caught on CCTV and his face was recognised by his ex-colleagues.

SOUTH EAST

Love was in the air when **Transdev Yellow Buses** used a combination of red roses and Valentine cards to woo new passengers. Seven thousand homes within walking distance of Ashley Road, Parkstone, Poole, received a Valentine's card promoting the company's 1b and 1c services.

The card, decorated in love hearts and titled 'Will you be mine?', included a six-line poem penned by Jenni Wilkinson, the company's communications and marketing manager.

Transdev Yellow Buses staff also handed out cards and more than 800 perfumed red roses to passengers waiting at bus stops along Ashley Road on Valentine's Day, February 14.

The cards gave users the opportunity to buy all-day travel for just £2 on the 1b and 1c for Valentine's Day. Such was the interest generated, the company will run the promotion on another part of the Yellow Buses' network next year.

Brighton-based social enterprise operator **Big Lemon** came a step nearer to launching its first service last week when founder Tom Druitt passed his CPC exam.

The 28-year-old former care home manager wants to set up a bus company – with bright yellow vehicles, hence the name – to rival successful incumbent Brighton & Hove Bus and Coach Company.

The company was registered in January and Mr Druitt hopes that the first service will start later this year. To qualify as a social enterprise, a company undertakes to reinvest 65% of profits in the community or its own services.

A female night bus driver was dragged up to the top deck and seriously sexually assaulted by a passenger. The **Solent Blue Line** employee was driving the number 3 Southampton-Hedge End bus late on February 4. She had just dropped off the last passenger and turned off the internal lights before heading back to Eastleigh depot. She then became aware of a person standing behind her. There was a struggle, with the woman being manhandled to the upper deck.

Roadworks

M62 Greater Manchester
Until April 6: Roadworks both ways at J21 (A640). Also between J6 (M57) and J7 (A57) until March 11.

M60 Greater Manchester
Until March 5: Roadworks at J1 (A5145) and J2 (AA560).

M1 South Yorkshire
Until October 31: Roadworks between J31 (A57) and J32 (M18).

M6 Cumbria/Lancs
Until March 26: Roadworks between J32 (M55) and J33 (A6). Also around J40 (A66).

M1 Herts / Beds
Until December 31, 2008: Roadworks both ways between J8 (A414) and J10 (M1). Also around J13 (A421) until May 31.

M25 Waltham Abbey
Until December 31: Roadworks between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121).

M11 Essex
Current: Roadworks around J9 (A11).

M5 Devon
Until June 21: Roadworks between J29 (A30) and J30 (A376).

M5 Gloucestershire
Until May 6: Roadworks between J8 (M50) and J9 (A46).

M4 Wiltshire
Until March 2: Roadworks between J16 (A3102) and J18 (A46). Also between J30 (A4232) and J32 (A470) in South Wales.

M6 West Midlands
Until August 31: Roadworks between J8 (M5) and J9 (A461); also J12 (A5) and J13 (A449).

M1 Northants/Leics
Until March 23: Roadworks around J15 (A45) and between J21A (A46) and J24 (A453).

M90 Bridge of Earn
Current: Roadworks between J9 (A912) and J10 (A912).

M74 South Lanarkshire
Current: Roadworks around J4 (M73).

M8 Renfrew
Current: Roadworks between J27 (A741) and J29 (A737).

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PUBLIC INQUIRY | FONETAX MINIBUS

"At the edge of the precipice"

A minibus company with a "disgraceful" maintenance record will have to comply with rigorous inspection conditions to survive

A family-owned company whose dangerous buses were discovered operating on school services will continue trading following a ruling by a traffic commissioner.

Fonetax Minibus Hire, run by Frank and Judith Mottershead, escaped having their operators' licence withdrawn despite the imposition of four prohibition notices and an admission that the firms vehicles had an "disgraceful" maintenance record.

Deputy Traffic Commissioner, Mark Hinchliffe, warned Fonetax that it would face serious action if they did not "step back from the precipice".

At a public inquiry in St Helens, Merseyside, Mr Hinchliffe described Fonetax Minibus Hire's maintenance records as being a "hotch-potch".

The North West Traffic Commissioner's hearing heard how the firm, based in Stockport, Greater Manchester, had been issued with four separate banning notices in less than a year, three of which were handed out to one vehicle.

Mrs Mottershead, 51, who was the company's transport manager, also had her repute as a transport manger examined by the hearing because of the failures.

The public inquiry heard how vehicle inspectors carrying out spot checks at a school discovered a minibus with serious defects. The P-plate Mazda vehicle was immediately placed under a prohibition notice on March 6, 2006. Two seatbelts were defective, one in imminent danger of becoming detached, as well as a passenger seat which was not properly anchored to the chassis of the 16-seater.

Another bus belonging to the company, which had an oil leak, was given a delayed prohibition by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency examiners, with ten days given to rectify the problem. The two notices came only four days after Fonetax had promised the North West Traffic Commissioner that improvements had been made to "'unsatisfactory" maintenance procedures.

The couple had written a letter on March 4, 2006, reassuring the commissioner about its approach after it was issued a warning letter at an inspection in November 2005.

VOSA inspector, Colin Brown, told the hearing that owner Frank Mottershead, 55, was away on holiday when he arrived at their operating centre in Bredbury, Greater Manchester, in June 2006

When questioned by the Fonetax's solicitor, Mike Cunningham, about why this was significant, Mr Brown replied: "On the last two occasion I visited Mr Mottershead's premises I was told he was not present. It made me think: 'Is he actually around and is he taking part in the maintenance procedures?'."

Following the notices issued at the school, Mr Brown arranged to inspect the Fonetax vehicles in June 2006. In evidence, he described a catalogue of

> TWO SEATBELTS WERE DEFECTIVE AND A PASSENGER SEAT WASN'T PROPERLY ANCHORED

defects in the operator's fleet of five minibuses. He revealed that a VW bus, suffering the oil leak, was discovered to have further defects when Fonetax applied to have the prohibition order lifted.

And at the June inspection, the 16-seater's brake load safety valve, a device which ensures even braking with extra weight on the bus, had seized.

He said: "The MoTs were unsatisfactory on numerous occasions, indicating they had been prepared for test in a poor condition. Defects noted at the time of the test would have been apparent if the vehicle had been inspected before the test.

"On checking inspection records it was apparent that the defects noted on the prohibition record and MoT failure were not listed on the relevant previous safety record. A P-registered LDV Convoy was re-presented for MoT on three occasions, with defects noted on the brakes and suspension, following the initial failure on the April 17, 2002.

"The X-registered Volkswagen was issued a prohibition notice for an excessive oil leak. The vehicle was presented to Bredbury Goods Vehicle Testing for prohibition clearance with defective steering components. As a result, the vehicle was issued a refusal to clear the existing prohibition notice.

"It is clear from the MoT history and prohibition notices issued that there are shortcomings in the maintenance system, leading to concern over the ability of the operator to maintain their vehicles in a fit and roadworthy condition.

"As a consequence, it is considered that operator is not complying with statement of intent with regard to maintenance submitted at the time of application for the operator licence."

Mr Hinchliffe questioned Frank Mottershead about who was tasked with maintenance of the vehicles. Mr Mottershead replied that Jason McCormack, an outside contractor, was responsible for the safety and preventative maintenance checks required.

But the deputy traffic commissioner admonished him, saying he was not interested in excuses.

He said: "He who pays the piper calls the tune. You get what you pay for. I am not interested in your excuses."

Mr Mottershead insisted that new systems introduced since their last inspection would ensure defects would be spotted. He said: "Now I make the drivers take a defect sheet when they come in the morning and collect the keys. They have to return the sheet and we act straight away on all the defects that come up. Ultimately, I don't trust people any more. I go around and do an additional check on each vehicle myself. It has been very difficult to get the drivers to do things the right way."

Mr Hinchliffe accepted Mr Mottershead's assurances about maintenance procedures after criticising the lack of records kept by the company.

He said: "It is a hotch-potch of different people dipping in and out of the maintenance, passing on information

KEY POINTS

- Multiple faults and successive MoT failures were uncovered by VOSA inspector
- The operator claimed drivers had failed to report defects
- The deputy traffic commissioner warned that this was the company's last chance

about what work needs to be done and different people writing it down. There is no audit trail for someone like Mr Brown or myself to follow."

In mitigation, solicitor Mike Cunningham said Mr Mottershead accepted record-keeping and maintenance standards were not up to scratch.

He said: "This operator has shown an intent to improve matters and in their own way it is working. Their history is frankly nothing short of disgraceful and I know they accept that."

Mr Hinchliffe ruled they could keep their operators' licence but agreed undertakings to improve their record.

Fonetax were ordered to ensure safety inspections were carried out no longer than six weeks apart and that this work should be carried out by a main dealer, who should also prepare vehicles for MoT tests.

The couple also agreed to undergo extra multi-point checks at a VOSA centre six months after every MoT.

They were also ordered to re-organise their financial affairs so that maintenance accounts could be held separately for inspection.

Mr Hinchliffe said: "You are standing at the edge of the precipice. Stand back or serious action will follow. This is a warning that any failure to comply with undertakings or any prohibition notices issued will lead to serious action which will undermine the commercial viability of the company. Mrs Mottershead's repute as a transport manager is tarnished but not lost.

"Any repeat will mean she will no longer be the transport manager of the company or any other firm. Anything less than a professional, polished approach to maintenance will not be tolerated."

After the hearing Mr Mottershead declined to comment.

Past comes back to haunt former operator

Having had their licence at Premiere of Plymouth Ltd revoked in 2003, former directors Jonathon Parker and Darren Clarke tried to set up a new business 'Red Rock Travel' last spring. They were called before Deputy Traffic Commissioner Fiona Richards to prove their competence.

Premiere of Plymouth Ltd had their licence revoked on February 28, 2003. During the inquiry into Premiere of Plymouth, the operator was linked to former company Premiere Coach Travel Ltd, which had had its licence revoked after an inquiry a year earlier. Directors of Premier Coach Travel, Jonathon Parker and Darren Clarke were also disqualified from obtaining an operator's licence for two years.

The application to set up Red Rock Travel was received by the Western Traffic Area Office last May. The forms were signed by Michelle Clarke, who stated she would be the sole owner. No details of a partnership were given and the CPC holder for the licence was given as Darren Clarke. An inquiry was called and took place in Bristol last month.

What the traffic commissioner heard

One issue under consideration was the financial standing of the company. Jonathon Parker provided three months' bank statements, but with one sheet missing. In case the financial picture during the missing period was different, the issue of finance was left outstanding.

Mr Parker explained he was only financing the business and that the day to day running would be handled by Michelle Clarke. He would only be involved in keeping an eye on his investment and possibly as a driver for the business.

Michelle Clarke said she had never run a coach company before, but that she was aware of the rules and did not intend to deviate from them. When questioned about omitting both Mr Parker and her husband, Mr Clarke, from the application she said she did not consider Parker to be a person included in the application as he was not a partner.

She said the same of her husband and transport manager, Darren Clarke.

Mr Parker accepted that his history would raise concerns in the commissioner's mind. He said Premiere expanded rapidly and his experience at the time led to him getting "swept along with it". At Premiere, he said, he was not the day to day manager, but that his duties were to run the yard. His yard duties did not, however, include allocating duties or checking tachograph records, which were found to be unsatisfactory.

Referring to his duties at Premiere as a driver, Parker admitted he was party to tachograph infringements. He said he did not understand the importance of tachographs, viewing them as "just another piece of paper no-one took no notice of".

In closing, Mr Parker said the problems of the past cannot be denied. "The operation was not run the way it should have been. I could see things were not right and in many ways, it was a relief when it folded," he added. He also admitted he wants to be a coach operator and not just a driver and that given the opportunity he will change his ways.

Mr Clarke said the intention was to buy a Volvo vehicle, no more than 8-10 years old. This would be in contrast with the aged fleet owned previously at Premiere. He said that all three realised there would be no room for failure.

What the traffic commissioner said

In a written statement, deputy traffic commissioner Fiona Richards said: "I find that both Jonathon Parker and Darren Clarke were involved in the operations of the Premiere companies in various capacities. During the time of their involvement, numerous very serious infringements took place which were found to be of sufficient concern to result in the decisions made to revoke the relevant licences and make orders of disqualification against the relevant directors.

"It appears to me from the evidence that Mr Jonathon Parker and Mr Darren Clarke will in practice be actively involved in the management and operation of the new business. By her own admission, Michelle Clarke is inexperienced in running a coach operation and her husband will act as both its principle driver and its transport manager.

"The previous history shows an apparent culture of disregard for licensing requirements, road traffic law and regulations and road safety. The businesses in which Messers Clarke and Parker were involved has seriously tarnished their credibility as witnesses.

"I feel it is inappropriate to assume that any undertakings given by this applicant will be fulfilled, particularly regarding arrangements for securing compliance with the requirements of the law relating to the driving and operation of the vehicles proposed to be used. The application for an operating licence is refused as I am not satisfied that the applicant meets the requirement to be of good repute and the requirement as to professional competence."

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New regulations for 2007

John Davies takes a look at recent changes in Government legislation and how they will affect your business in the coming year

The Government has started off 2007 by issuing a formal policy commitment to cut red tape by 25% by 2012. Some in business will greet this announcement with relief - others will prefer to believe it when they see it. Regardless of such commitments, the Government's law-making machinery inevitably steams on and the following new measures are due to come on stream during 2007.

Companies Act 2006

The biggest single statute in the history of UK legislation is scheduled to come into effect in stages during 2007 and 2008. The exact dates for bringing the Companies Act 2006 into force have still to be decided but the Government has said that it hopes that most it will be in force by October 2007 and that, whatever happens, it will all be in force by October 2008.

In drafting the Act, the Government set out to streamline the framework of legal rules which govern the administration of private companies. There are some measures in this area but for many companies they will not materially lessen the compliance burden that already exists.

The two main reforms presented as helping to lighten the burden for small companies are as follows:

AGM

No private company will in future be required to hold an Annual General Meeting (or to lay its annual accounts before its members in general meeting). This makes sense for micro-companies with only one or a handful of shareholders who are all involved in the management of the company anyway. But private companies may already pass a resolution to opt out of the standard rule on this. All that will change in future is that the default legal rule will be that no AGM (or laying of accounts) will be required. Private companies which wish to take advantage of this exemption for the first time should however check their articles of association - if these have not been amended for many years they may still require or expect the company to hold an AGM. Such provisions may need to be amended so as to enable the company to take full advantage.

The company secretary

No private company will in future be required to appoint a company secretary (though it may continue to have one if it wishes). Again, this is presented as a deregulatory measure, and it is true that in many cases the post of secretary has not been considered to be a highly important one - the law has not helped in this regard by imposing no qualification requirement on the office of secretary. Private companies that might wish to take advantage of this change should however think about all the implications - abolishing the post of company secretary does not mean that all the work which is usually undertaken by the secretary is also abolished - all companies, including small private companies, will still have to comply with all the legal rules regarding, eg. the keeping of statutory registers, handling of share transfers, administration of directors' meetings and completion and filing of the annual return, that they may currently entrust to their secretary. Directors of companies which wish to do away with the post of secretary in their company should therefore acknowledge that the responsibility for dealing with all these matters will revert to them.

What may be of more practical use to companies large and small is that the law will in future respect the right of companies to send official documentation, eg notices of meetings and written resolutions, to members by email as well as in hard copy format. It is likely that the new default articles of association will be amended on a similar basis so as to acknowledge the entitlement of directors to conduct their affairs in electronic form.

> THE COMPANIES ACT 2006 IS THE BIGGEST SINGLE STATUTE IN THE HISTORY OF UK LEGISLATION

One significant change to company law which has already taken effect is that companies must now include the same information that they have long been obliged to include on their hard copy stationery - their company registration number, the address of their registered office, the country in which they are registered - on their website (if they have one).

■ *http://www.dti.gov.uk/bbf/co-act-2006/index.html*

Employment law

As from April 6, the legal right for an employee to ask to work under new, 'flexible working' arrangements is extended. Currently, this right applies to employees who have natural or adopted children up to the age of six or disabled children up to the age of 18. This right is now extended to staff with caring responsibilities for adults. As is the case at present, the legal right is only to ask the employer for 'flexible working' arrangements. There is no absolute right to have the request acceded to, although a refusal on the part of the employer must be justified by reference to one or more of the prescribed grounds, such as the burden of additional costs which approval would impose on the business.

Also as from April 2007, the Work and Families Act 2007 will extend maternity and adoption pay from six months to nine months

■ *http://www.dti.gov.uk/employment/workandfamilies/index.html*

National Minimum Wage

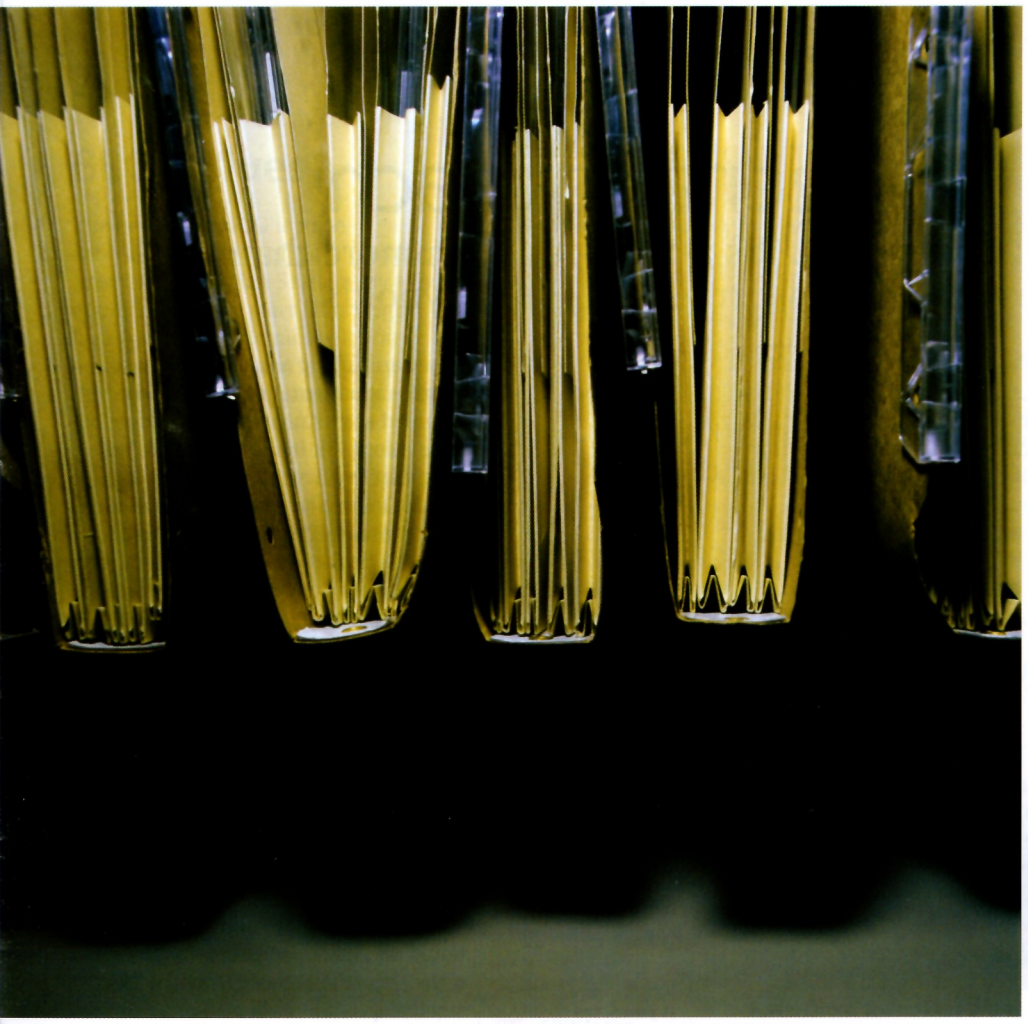
It has become routine to upgrade the rate of the national minimum wage in October of each year. We can therefore expect the current rates (£5.35 an hour for adults and £4.45 for those between 18-21) to be revised again later this year.

■ *http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw/*

Recovery of NHS treatment costs

One new measure which has already been introduced, as from January 29, 2007, and which will have important implications for all businesses, concerns the entitlement of the NHS to recover the cost of treating injuries of any kind where those injuries have been caused by negligence. This will affect cases where an employee, or a customer or client, incurs some injury on business premises and as a result has to undergo some form of NHS treatment. Where the injured party successfully sues the business - or other negligent party - the NHS will in future be able to recover the costs of the treatment from that business. The NHS claim will, initially, be capped at £37,100.

In the vast majority of cases, claims from the NHS under these new regulations will be met out of employers' insurance policies, although those policies may impose a cap on the amounts that may be paid out under them - in such cases, the employer will be required to fund the difference. Even if businesses do not find themselves in a situation where they actually have to meet claims, they will be still affected by this reform since it will inevitably be factored into the cost of their insurance



policies. Those businesses which do not take out employers or public liability insurance - it will be remembered that the former is compulsory - should be aware that, should they be faced with a claim under these new regulations, they will have to meet it themselves.

■ *http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20070115.htm*

Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation

A measure which has attracted considerable interest, and little controversy, is the Government's proposal to extend the existing prohibition against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the field of employment to the provision of goods and services. These new rules, due to come into effect in April, will add to the already substantial raft of legal rules governing discrimination.

The effect of this latest reform, which has already been brought into effect in Northern Ireland (though it is being subjected to judicial review there), will be to make it illegal to discriminate against any person in the provision of business services on the grounds of sexual orientation. Thus, a business will not be entitled to deny access to goods and services on the grounds that a prospective client or customer is or may be homosexual (or indeed is heterosexual, or bisexual).

In the majority of conceivable cases, the sexual orientation of a prospective client or customer will not be an issue for the provider and the new regulations will have no impact - the well-publicised opposition to the Government's proposals from, eg. adoption agencies and small hotels, are likely to be isolated exceptions. But as with all similar legislation, businesses will have to ensure that their staff are aware of the effect of the new rules since they will be liable for the actions of their staff whether or not those actions are done with their knowledge or approval.

> BUSINESSES WILL BE LIABLE FOR THE ACTIONS OF THEIR STAFF WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE DONE WITH THEIR KNOWLEDGE

■ *http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2006/20060439.htm*

The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive

The aim of the WEE Directive is to minimise the impact of electrical and electronic goods on the environment by increasing re-use and recycling and reducing the amount of these goods being dumped on landfill sites. It does that by making producers of such goods responsible for financing the collection, treatment and recovery of waste electrical equipment and by obliging distributors to allow consumers to return their waste equipment free of charge.

Regulations implementing the Directive in the UK came into effect on January 2, 2007. They cover a wide range of goods such as refrigerators and freezers, washing machines, microwaves, electric radiators, minicomputers, telephones, TV sets and even electric train sets. They apply to producers of the goods referred to above, retailers and distributors, local authorities, the waste management industry, exporters and businesses and other non-household users of affected goods. All of these parties will commit criminal offences if they infringe the rules which apply to them.

■ *http://www.dti.gov.uk/innovation/sustainability/weee/page30269.html*

Fraud

A new Fraud Act comes into force in 2007. This new Act updates the law in this area and introduces a number of new offences which may be committed by companies or individuals. These new offences of fraud include fraud by false representation, fraud by failing to disclose information and fraud by abusing a position. The offences carry maximum jail sentences of ten years.

■ *http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060035.htm*

Corporate Manslaughter

Still before Parliament is a measure that will impose a new criminal offence on businesses that cause death. Incongruous as it may sound, the common law offence of corporate manslaughter has existed for many years but has proved notoriously difficult to bring about convictions. The aim of the Corporate Manslaughter Bill is to make it easier for this to be done. Under the Bill a company would commit an offence if a person to whom the company owes a duty of care dies as the result of a gross breach of that duty of care; further the death must have been caused by serious failings in the way that the company is managed or governed. A company found guilty under this new offence will be subject to a unlimited fine and, unless the terms of the Bill are changed before it becomes law, there will be no personal consequences for the company's directors. This has caused many to query the need for the new legislation at all, since very heavy fines may already be imposed on companies for breach of health and safety rules.

■ *http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2005-corporate-manslaughter/?version=1*

John Davies is Head of Business Law at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountant

The thoughts of a teenage coach

Do coaches have feelings? This one has. It's a teenager, with more than its share of angst. And it has shared its worries with Sue Reynolds...

I think I am having an identity crisis. I know I am a bit of a snob, I tend to get stroppy if people call me a bus (I learnt that from my driver). But, in truth, I guess I am really a kind of bus, it is just not cool to admit it. Deep down, I'm better than a bus because I can go faster and my body is just so much smarter. I wouldn't be seen out with all those yellow poles and things. 'Construction and Use' says that a bus cannot go faster than 60mph. I can - I was designed to go faster than that - but I have also got this thing that stops me going over 62, and if that goes wrong I am not allowed out. So it does all seem a lot of fuss about a difference of 2mph. And this very small difference causes a mountain of prejudice; it is making my life hell. For the sake of the two miles I have to have seatbelts. Frankly they are ugly, they don't go with anything and no one uses them anyway. And now, like a crop of zits, I've got blue stickers all over my glass.

I call myself a public transport provider, like a bus or a train, only better. If my people go into London by public transport they get two-for-the-price-of-one discounts to loads of tourist attractions; but not if they travel with me. If I was public transport I would get free parking and special places to let my people off and pick them up again. I don't - instead I get these "suits" sticking tickets on me. I don't like being touched by strangers and it upsets my driver.

In which case, I could be a private transport provider - like a cab. Don't really like their colour schemes, but they could learn a lot from me.

If I was private transport I could drop and pick up my people on a red route - but I can't. Maybe I am just a car that carries a large number of people - in which case I could travel in a high-occupancy lane - but I can't.

I know I'm not a car; even half full I emit less greenhouse gases and particulates than the cars I am replacing, but when TfL wants to lower particulates in the capital I am targeted as the evil polluter. And the thousands of dirty, really old and ancient cars that pump out loads of pollution and cause congestion just get ignored. Anyone would think I wasn't even Euro, I am Euro 1.

This is the reason for my crisis: I like to think I am in my prime and have a great future, but I've been listening to what they say about me. Can you believe they've been talking about getting me a new engine? There is nothing wrong with my engine: it is sweet. £25,000 just for an engine and I wouldn't be seen dead with that make. They say my own make won't provide a new engine. They just don't understand what they could buy me for that kind of money. I need some new fabric and a paint job. Let's face it, these colours are so last year. And the sound system is an embarrassment. For that kind of money I could get some real bling on board; perhaps some Jimmy Choo tyres.

They are not getting me an engine - they are talking about getting me a "trap" - a lump of metal that will be clamped across my pipe. I will have to wear it for ever. It's like having to wear a tag, but I've never been issued with an ASBO. I just know it will increase my back pressure; it's totally uncool and it will do my head in. How can they expect me to go out looking like that?

There is another option - and I know they are talking about it - they might send me away. If they send me far enough away, they will find a place where it does not matter that I am so old. ("Old?" How can they say that?) A place in the country where I can pollute to my heart's content. But my friends might be coming with me, so that would be better. My driver won't; he's talking about jacking it all in anyway - something to do with cutting his hours and having to get extra training. If they do sell me to the country they say that everyone will be doing the same thing and the bottom will fall out of the market. I don't think they should talk about my bottom at all.

I heard this great joke the other day. Question: who am I? My ingredients are regarded as wasteful of raw materials and carcinogenic. My product is one that is enjoyed for the moment, gone, and just a memory by tomorrow. My excesses and bi-products are regarded as a nuisance and a pollutant, particularly in London.

Answer: the press. Hah!

Sue Reynolds is a director of Reynolds Diplomat Coaches

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your Open Platform to: *CBW*, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Forder Way, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8GX

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

- Face to Face - with Mark Dowd OBE, chair of Merseytravel
- Setra Test - On the road in Setra's flagship
- Veolia - In the spotlight...
- Training Special

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BSOG Blues

The news that BSOG is to be abolished in favour of a per-passenger alternative (*CBW* Jan 31) is in my view doomed from the start. This bright idea from the academics will bring nothing but chaos and inequality throughout the UK bus network and the real world we live in.

One of the reasons being given for the change is that it will provide a greater incentive for operators to attract more passengers, especially in urban areas. This might be fine in theory, but how will it work in practice? If the new system was introduced, operators would be laughing all the way to the bank on the high patronage routes... but surely routes with low passenger numbers would simply be dropped. In contrast, the current system does not differentiate between high and low usage and therefore operators can afford in many cases to continue running low-demand services, meeting the public need.

Shortly after New Labour came to power it introduced financial incentives to provide additional bus services to rural areas, yet it has since dropped these. The government now appears to be putting that policy into reverse and intends to encourage operators to abandon low-demand routes. Where is the logic in that argument? If they press ahead with this proposal operators will have to act quickly in order to balance their books and the travelling public will suffer from a reduction in services.

The second reason they give for the change is that operators will be encouraged to operate more fuel-efficient vehicles. This is nonsense, as I don't know of an operator that doesn't already consider the fuel consumption when making their vehicle purchases. Operators may be relieved of 80% of their fuel duty but they are still paying approximately half of the normal retail price for fuel so it is already very much in their interest to cut fuel usage.

For some reason the politicians have got a bee in their bonnet about bus companies making excessive profits; they also think that everyone should travel by public transport regardless of who they are or where they live. While the profits can be high they are typically in proportion to the heavy capital investment needed to maintain modern bus fleets. The notion that buses should meet everyone's expectations is flawed. A balanced transport policy that incorporates all forms of transport is what we need.

The "experts" have failed to see that the bus industry has responded extremely well in places like London, delivering a service that could not have been achieved by any other method. It has also been delivered within the cost constraints and within the timescales. Instead of knocking bus operators the government should be lauding them as one of the successes.

Andrew Richmond, Managing Director, Epsom Coaches Group

LETTER OF THE WEEK

I have just read Ian Fox's reasoning behind the Cal Mac increases. What incredible naivety – to suggest that three coaches equals 150 people! My company does not do too badly on load averages, but I would be living in the Bahamas if I could find that kind of loading (especially on 49-seater vehicles!). Is he telling us that his ships run to capacity on every voyage and he assumes we do the same? I don't think so. The fare increase on a FULL coach actually works out at 17%. How does that 'help operators' as Mr Fox suggests?

The change in fare structure was either designed, as I said initially, to achieve avaricious increases, or it was naive beyond belief. Possibly both!

Tony Laver, Laver Holidays

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

***CBW* is the only paid-for weekly news magazine for the coach and bus industry. Each week the magazine provides a unique insight. Your views are always welcome. Write to the editor at the above address**

Dublin Tunnel

Having visited Dublin in early January 2007 all signs leaving the docks stated that the new tunnel was for use by HGVs only. This was soon confirmed when our coach and the four coaches we followed were stopped and turned back at the toll booths

Can coaches now use the tunnel? Or am I correct in saying HGVs only?

John Dearden, JST of Darwen

***CBW* replies: We understand that there was a 'soft' opening of tunnel with it initially only open to HGVs. It was opened to all traffic on January 28, 2007.**

Common Mistake?

One of my drivers recently took a group of people from South Wales to Heathrow airport returning empty to our depot in South Wales. He left our depot at 1am in the morning and returned back to our depot at 3pm in the afternoon. A few days later he was subject to a roadside check. His driving hours were all in order, but I was informed that he and I had committed an offence under the Working Time Directive. Apparently any working day which extends into the period between 1am and 5am in the morning is classified as "night time working" and the driver is only allowed to work for a maximum of ten hours in this working day. My driver had worked for 11 hours as he had recorded loading and unloading as work. Ironically, you can opt out of this, and this is where we tripped up. If you wish to opt out you must have a "workforce agreement" in place which must be agreed with the drivers and signed, and we have been advised the driver should carry a copy to prove this. If this is not the case then an offence is apparently committed. I am sure like myself, a lot of companies and drivers are not aware of this.

Mark Pritchard, Carmarthen, Wales

CBW's parliamentary insider takes a bi-weekly look at the political scene along the corridors of Westminster and inside Marsham Street

When the pricing isn't right

The online petition against road pricing is the largest recorded protest against government policy. Can ministers afford to dismiss it? Will backbenchers and peers rebel? It's guaranteed a bumpy ride

By the time this edition of *CBW* arrives in your post, the petition on the No 10 website against road pricing will have just closed - and current estimates are that the total number of signatures will be close to the 2 million mark. No doubt a goodly proportion of these will be duplicates or fictitious in some form or another, but this will still make this particular petition the largest recorded and will no doubt give many politicians food for thought.

Ministers will, of course, continue to insist that road pricing is necessary and inevitable if the problems of congestion are to be addressed. But backbench MPs are beginning to make murmurings against the idea, and Graham Stringer has been increasingly critical of the DfT for using the bribe of large amounts of cash from the Transport Innovation Fund to coerce reluctant local authorities to work up congestion charging proposals.

The fact is that the government has, thus far, not done a particularly effective sales job on the public to persuade them of the merits of road pricing; and while it is seen as simply another way for the Chancellor to raise money, it is difficult to see the electorate taking anything other than a dim view of it. Local councillors and constituency MPs up and down the country will always have one eye on the ballot box in determining whether road pricing is good or bad for their particular town or city. Meanwhile, Stephen Ladyman and Douglas Alexander can preach to us about the necessity of road pricing, safe in the knowledge that they will be long gone before any national scheme is upon is.

Ken Livingstone was, of course, re-elected as London Mayor after introducing the London congestion charge. But this is probably not a good litmus test, since a large part of his electorate live outside the charging zone and probably don't pay it anyway. The electorate in Edinburgh who roundly rejected the idea at a referendum probably provide a better guide to what the voter really thinks.

The publication of the draft Road Transport Bill in the Spring (presumably after the elections on May 3) will give MPs and others a further opportunity to voice their views on the whole road pricing initiative. The current indications are that this is unlikely to provide ministers with a unanimous endorsement of their policies. And with some reports suggesting that congestion in central London is getting worse again, ministers are going to have their work cut out to secure the kind of consensus in favour of road pricing that Alistair Darling insisted, while he was Transport Secretary, was so necessary.

Indeed, the whole Road Transport Bill is not guaranteed to have an easy passage through Parliament when it is formally introduced next November. Aside from the road pricing provisions that it will contain, Labour MPs are waking up to the fact that the Bill's bus provisions are unlikely to be as they would wish. The recent Adjournment Debate on the bus policy review was, I suggest, a little irritable. We heard many Labour MPs, particularly those with metropolitan constituencies, voice doubts about whether the proposals contained in the policy paper actually went far enough. If you are a supporter of Quality Contracts they almost certainly do not, despite ministerial assurances to the contrary.

> THE ROAD TRANSPORT BILL IS NOT GUARANTEED AN EASY PASSAGE THROUGH PARLIAMENT IN NOVEMBER

The Transport Select Committee's inquiry into the draft Bill during the summer, as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, will give ministers a clear indication of the level of support, or not, for the Bill, and I would venture to suggest they will not be given an easy time by Gwyneth Dunwoody and her merry men (and women) on the committee. Indeed, the whips may also have their work cut out come the Bill's parliamentary proceedings to keep rebellious backbenchers in line. Transport legislation is rarely the stuff of party rebellions, but I wouldn't be too complacent if I was you, Douglas! And keep your eye on the Lords, too, where, given the reduced ability of the whips to keep peers in line, I can see greater scope for amendments being made to the Bill which would give the PTEs more of what they want.

Of course, Douglas Alexander may no longer be Secretary for State for Transport come November! If he is moved on to pastures new in what is likely to be a pretty major cabinet reshuffle once Gordon Brown has the keys to No 10, will a new Secretary of State feel committed to the policies of his predecessor? Or will he be minded to take a fresh look, particularly if the Transport Select Committee comes out with a critical report on the draft Bill?

With the department having carried out a pretty thorough review of bus policy over the last few months, logic suggests that no new Secretary for State would want to go back to the drawing board. But egged on by the select committee and a gaggle of vocal backbenchers, there could be some pressure to do so.

In practice, of course, the Bill may be drafted in such a way that many of its provisions can be adjusted in the future by secondary legislation, thus giving politicians and PTEs encouragement that they can secure policy change at a late date without the need for fresh primary legislation.

One key issue is what criteria will be applied to establish if a Quality Contract application meets the new public policy test. If the criteria are not enshrined in legislation, which seems unlikely, but only in policy guidance, then I can see plenty of scope for the PTEs to maintain a constant lobby to tilt the public policy test in their favour, making it a far easier test to meet than current indications suggest will be the case.

That doesn't bear thinking about - we need this Bill to be the end of the bus policy debate. Let's hope it is drafted with that objective in mind.

The Riddler

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FACE TO FACE with ALAN SCOLES

Promoting Coaching

In his first major interview since becoming CPT President, Alan Scoles reveals a passion for the industry, and a clear minded plan for how to drive it (all) forward. Andy Peace reports

Andy Peace: The major theme of your speech to the CPT dinner was promoting the industry, like you said getting the subject further up the agenda. How will that happen?

Alan Scoles: Well, we have to get in at all levels of consultation, and that is particularly at the local level because that is where we get forgotten. Certainly in the north-west. We have been getting involved in Manchester and Liverpool, Blackpool and it's starting in Cumbria. We are starting to get in on their transport plans; we're weren't even getting mentioned before.

AP: This is LTP1, and LTP 2?

AS: Yes, well LTP2. For instance, Liverpool is now creating a soon to be launched Coach Strategy. An official document launched by the City Council with which we in the north west CPT have been involved. It's focused on 2008, but a lot of what they are doing has nothing to do with 2008. It's no different to what's starting to happen in London, like when Andrew Lloyd-Webber asked why his theatres were all empty. It was because we couldn't get the people who want to go to the theatres anywhere near them. Then there was lobbying and suddenly Bob's your uncle, or Bob Pilbeam's your uncle, a load of coach bays suddenly appeared on the Kingsway and that started the drip, drip, drip. But it wouldn't have been on any political agenda because no public money goes into it. So nobody thinks about it.

AP: This is another thing that came out of your speech. It was just one line but you did say the coach industry doesn't receive any public money. Were you looking at the minister when you said that?

AS: Not particularly, I wasn't asking for public money. It was just an observation that we end up being left out because there is no public accountability; it's not a public topic. So I wasn't particularly asking for subsidy. I think it's worth noting that other modes of transport do get a lot of public money, but I think there's a plus side that we don't - because we're not accountable, we can do what we want. But because we manage to survive without any public money they should no less recognise the importance of our industry.

AP: Some people are asking whether the industry can survive in its present form.

AS: I don't see why they should say that. I think that's out of ignorance. We have so many of the solutions - social exclusion, congestion, climate change, all that sort of thing, and the desire that people still have to move about freely. Because what we can do in the coach industry, and the bus industry, we have the capacity to shift any number of people at any time whatsoever. From anywhere to anywhere. No other mode can do that.

Every major football team in this country, how do they travel round? By coach. It isn't the last resort for many people, it's the chosen method. These are millionaires travelling around on those coaches. It provides a fantastic service, meeting their demands - particularly for occasional travel, where you're not stuck to the fixed transport infrastructure of a place; you go on your leisure trips, you take the kids to the museum.

> THE STRONGER WE ARE AS AN INDUSTRY THE BETTER – AND YOU SHOULD BE ON THE INSIDE

Coach provides the answers, so why not support it and recognise it exists. We are banned from picking up at bus stations to take our people on holiday because the local authority says: 'I'm only interested in local bus services; I'm not interested in holidays'.

AP: How do you go about countering those attitudes?

AS: We're getting in there more. It's up to our industry to keep nagging away. Nobody other than us can take responsibility for it. We have got to lead and keep nagging away and try to persuade them of the errors of their ways.

AP: Going back a bit, when you talk about getting in at the local level you're talking to both coach and bus operators?

AS: Yes, it applies to both.

AP: Are you talking to the CPT members in these regions, or are you talking to individual coach and bus operators?

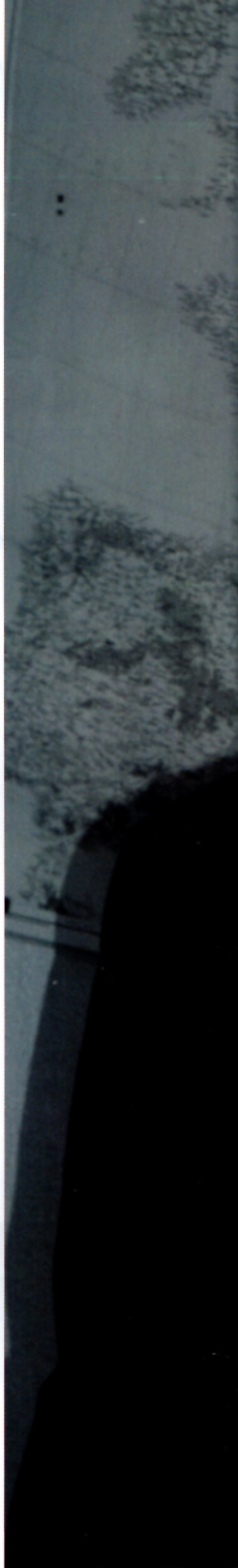
AS: There is a role for the individual operators, but there is less of a role, other than under the CPT umbrella because then you can say you represent the industry. If you are a small coach operator with six coaches, a local authority is unlikely to think of you as a representative of anything other than your own six coaches. So CPT is the one that authorities will recognise as a trade body, as an established, official responsible body for our industry. As operators we can go in together and we work extremely well together. The other thing is we can represent all the various aspects of the industry. When we come together it pulls all the resources in.

AP: Are you happy that operators in general are taking advantage of CPT?

AS: There are three bands that people fall into. There are those that join, recognise that joining a trade body, the advantages for it, the different advantages they all get. Others will use it because of the advice they can get from the specialists within CPT. Then of course you've got those operators at the bottom end that we probably wouldn't want in CPT, because they don't represent the good side of the industry, the bad apples. And then there are those who are perfectly capable, perfectly good operators, but think they don't need CPT, that there's no benefit to their particular business and that perhaps any benefit that the industry does get they can ride on the back of even though they haven't been members of it. And those are the ones I would appeal to. The stronger we are as an industry the better - and you should be inside rather than outside.

AP: How much of a problem do you think the bad apples are in the industry?

AS: I don't think there are that many bad apples. The trouble is the press always latch on to it when there is. There has



New CPT President Alan Scoles

to be a recognition that everybody is meeting a customer demand and some of the people we carry are not very demanding, therefore the operator doesn't supply a quality product because he's not being asked to. There is an element of that. And obviously, in any industry, in any sphere of society, there are some dishonest people around.

Our industry has got a reasonable reputation: our safety record, and our record on delivering the service that customers want is very good.

We're in this industry because we believe there is a future for this industry. And I hope last week I gave that impression. We have a passion for the people and that's the staff, the customers that we have and would like to have going forwards and if you haven't got that sort of passion, and that optimistic view of what is round the corner what the heck is the point in being in?

The only problem we have as an industry is that people don't think about us. If we could get people to think about us, we have a fantastic service - it's just a bit hidden. We're obviously quite a small industry, so it's not an easy task, but the service we provide for the people going into London, from both the UK and incoming. How is the incoming group ever going to see London or another part of the country without a coach?

AP: Is there more to the lack of recognition than just the lack of public money?

AS: It's because we're small and because nobody else will ever win any votes by supporting us. It's not a vote winner. It's not a vote loser either, but the only time that we're ever really on the agenda locally is when they are trying to ban us. Because the coach park is next to a housing estate so there is all these horrible noisy emitting vehicles parked up and they don't want them near their houses. Nobody wants the thing - it just gets lumped where it has to. But at some places they are quite happy to have the people that they bring, they just don't want the vehicles that go with it, until they go abroad. What percentage go on their holiday to Spain or wherever and they have a coach transfer to wherever they are going? Virtually everybody, but they don't use it in this country. Football supporters - how will virtually everybody be getting to Cardiff in two weeks to get to Arsenal/Chelsea? They'll get a coach, certainly a large chunk of them. It'll contribute more than the train will.

AP: It doesn't seem to transfer across.

AS: That's because to a degree we're such a good service everybody takes it as read. They take it as automatic.

AP: There are two strands to your argument about promotion: one, to the local authorities which we've discussed. The other side is to the customers. Do you think there is the scope to promote coach travel – or even bus travel as well – to the general population?

AS: No, I don't think so. I don't see the need to do it nationally because it's a local issue. Because the decision is a local decision. I don't think any national advertising is of any relevance because you are not thinking about it nationally.

You think locally, on this day when I go to wherever, what mode of transport is right for me? The starting point is the car because it's got an infinite frequency, because it's there every second so when I oversleep it is still there or I can catch the next car. The bus isn't, but if you had bus lanes where that bus overtakes your car that makes the journey quicker. If you know the bus is always going to turn up when you want it, which is an element of frequency and reliability. It's also publicising it in a local context.

There has to be proper bus priorities ›

or large-movers-of-people priorities along some of these strategic corridors, involving coaches as well, because coaches again get left out. There are two types of park-and-ride at the moment in this country. Two miles from the centre of town there's a big car park and people use a lowfloor bus to get into town to do their shopping. The other kind is at rail heads, where people come in their car and then catch the train into the main centres and that could be ten, 15, 20, 30 miles away on average. You haven't got a park-and-ride that involves a coach which you could have at strategic motorway junctions that are not on the rail network.

The most obvious one is the M40. A classic example where we know a coach service into London is better than rail. If you live in High Wycombe, outside your front door there's an absolutely fantastic service every five minutes. But it doesn't get the assistance, there's no encouragement. When they get to London they are in with all the rest of the traffic and stuck. And then you've got the high-occupancy lanes at the bottom of the M1. There's a view that coaches will be excluded from that. It just shows that there's no vision for our industry, for using our mode as a solution to some of the congestion problems. There's no vision.

AP: BSOG is being reformed at the moment. But if...

AS: It is a very difficult one because you could say the logic in having it is that every other mode gets subsidised. Air, rail, bus. If every other element is being subsidised then you could say it's unfair competition. For instance, from 2008 every pensioner is going to able to travel from Wigan to Torquay for nothing, on a bus, even if it might take them a few days to do it. I would say that was unfair. National Express don't get an awful lot of assistance. But they are part of the national transport network and as other modes are assisted then, yes, perhaps they should be assisted. I think that's all I'm saying, if I'm not going to be shot down by the industry for saying it. I've got no desire to go scrounging for money just for the sake of it, but let's have a level paying field.

AP: 53 people on a coach makes it efficient and cost-effective, but it's not cheap is it by any stretch? I see ten-day coach holidays for £700-£800, more even.

AS: No, they're not cheap holidays. As with any product there's a cheap end and a very expensive end. It depends what you are going for. If you want to go on a touring holiday to Europe, it's one of two ways to go, but we do everything for you. You haven't got the hassle of sorting out the hotels, the best venues to go and have a look at because we will sort it. All that sort of stuff is a fantastic product that we can put together for those who don't want the hassle. We do cater for all sectors of society, we do it in all the various markets and the various products.

AP: But government support would make the margins more healthy, and it would enable that price to come down so it was more competitive. It can cost a lot more to go on a coach holiday. Mind you, why shouldn't it?

AS: Exactly. Holidays aren't what one would consider should be subsidised. I would actually argue, certainly in the case of air, other than lifeline stuff to highlands and islands, there is no way they should be supported. None whatsoever.

What I would say is that things like tolls and stuff and congestion charges, parking is another where local authorities will see that as a fantastic

> I'VE GOT NO DESIRE TO GO SCROUNGING FOR MONEY JUST FOR THE SAKE OF IT, BUT LET'S HAVE A LEVEL FIELD

revenue stream and we should be seen as a service and allowed to use those local public services and it's recognised that it's a service.

AP: Have you got a wish-list of things you want to achieve this year? I'm understanding that perhaps things aren't going to change overnight.

AS: One is obviously to get more formalised arrangements, recognition, involvement at local and regional level in the various consultations that go on and the various groups that meet. You have to have a long-term vision because if you turn up at a meeting and listen to some of the views of the local horse brigade and cyclists, etc you might think it's like turning the direction of a super tanker. But if you don't do it you've got no chance. It will require effort and time, that's a fact. But if we don't turn up to some of these meetings where they are formulating transport strategy, and we don't contribute, then it's not surprising that schemes come out that ignore us. We've got to keep nagging, and nagging away. In the north-west - I can't comment too much on other areas because I've not been involved - we are on the agenda now, people think about us. I'm on distribution lists, that name is there, that the CPT is there. We do go to meetings.

Born and raised in Kent, Alan Scoles joined Greater Manchester Transport straight from college in 1977 as a management trainee, rising to senior schedules officer for the six depots in the west of the region.

In 1986 he was appointed traffic manager for Shearings Holidays, part of the Pleasurama Group, which also included Smiths Happiways and the soon to be acquired National Holidays. The company subsequently refocused on coach holidays, and after a management buyout in 1996 he became operations planning director.

He has been involved in CPT committees for over 10 years, including CoachMarque since its creation in 1998 and last year was chairman of Coach Commission.

What I want to try and do is establish what else there is around the country and try and see if there is a pattern of areas where we do get involved and bits where we miss out as well. The same thing applies in Europe - if you take the Driver's Hours, that was all about freight and we just got dragged into it.

AP: What's going to happen about that - Driver's Hours?

AS: I don't know - all I know is the German unions and employers are up in arms about the loss of the 12-day rule and of course the AETR countries have said they don't want to adopt it. Which has given us a chance to reconsider and lobby.

The Olympics is the other one I want to get underway because, in my opinion, our industry has probably been missed off or we're a bit further behind all the other transport modes. All the rail plans have been in for years. There's been huge investment and yet for our industry there is absolutely nothing. Even the underground have got extra carriages already on the way five years off. In our industry I've no doubt that TfL has the capacity to put on extra services within London, that's not a problem. But what is there for outside? If you live in Royston, what is there for you going into the Olympics? There is nothing other than an assumption that you are quite happy to go into central London, switch trains across to St Pancras to catch the Javelin. And the further out from London you are the less chances there are of that happening because you don't use the London network, you are afraid of it, you think 11 o'clock at night I've got to get this Javelin back to St Pancras, how do I get across to my station, will there still be a last train? I think the logic will still be, particularly for families where there is the issue of price, I'm going in my car, where can I get to where I can transfer onto something? And you want something around the M25 to do that, with a fast and efficient regular service taking you in to the Olympics which is where I think the coach comes in because the distances will be too far for a bus. I would argue if they do it properly they will have a legacy because they could be using it for potential commuter runs

long term into London. Then our industry in 2010 can buy a whole load of new coaches and recruit a whole load of new drivers who have got something after 2012. Because the focus is not 2012, its actually 2013, 2014. What can you do with these things afterwards? Because if you need what they need, 1,500 coaches, our industry is no different to the rail or the bus we could not do it for six weeks. There is no financial justification for doing it because you wouldn't invest in anything for six weeks. You need something long term so you can go and recruit and have justification and its not just the finance. But where am I going to advertise for 4,500 drivers? Now an element will come from operators saying I'm not going to run any other trips during that period, I'll stick my coaches on the Olympics. But for any operator running holidays or with any other regular contract the whole world won't stop turning because of the Olympics. It's only the ad hoc private hire fleet you've got running around that will be available. It therefore needs without doubt a long-term legacy, some vision for the coaches they need to provide the service into the site.

AP: You must be quite disappointed then about these park-and-ride sites that have been dropped from the draft plan?

AS: Yes. There are still some ideas boiling away, I think, but to do that shows no vision whatsoever. Absolutely none.

AP: What's happening now then – you mentioned in your speech a meeting with the ODA.

AS: We had that in January and we'll be following that on. The issues are to consider everything really, from the specification of the vehicles that are required, because again it's got to have a legacy value, emissions, finance and the logistics of it. How are we going to recruit all these drivers? It's an industry problem, not an individual coach operator's problem.

We need to come up with some of the ideas of what we think could be viable and where we can help if somebody will help us. The most obvious thing is the HOV lanes. If you give us HOV lanes into London then that opens up all sorts of opportunities for our industry. But if you don't then any encouragement to invest or come up with schemes disappears. That's where I see the way in. It's as much our industry's responsibility to shift all the people at the Olympics as it is the ODA's. If we're proud of our industry it's a brilliant opportunity, admittedly only for six weeks, to show what a fantastic ability we have to shift people around.

AP: Changing the subject – how much time will you be spending working on the Road Transport Bill this year?

AS: What we've done makes a big improvement to the senior management team at CPT. The president and the director general were the two figureheads and they did virtually everything themselves, which may or may not have been relevant to their specialist skills.

What we've now got is a team with the immediate past president, the president, the senior vice-president, the chairman of the finance committee and the chief executive as the president's committee who will – not taking anything away from council – run things as a team. So for instance on the Bus Bill, Steve Clayton will be dealing with that, I won't go anywhere near it.

It allows the president, who doesn't really contribute in their vice-president years, to build up to it, and you'll have learnt some of the ropes.

And then when you've finished being president you'll be able to pass on some of that experience whereas at the moment you're put out to grass really. I'm quite positive about that, I think it'll be a huge benefit to CPT. Everything's evolutionary, but it's become necessary with things like the concessionary fares and the transport bill such huge topics that it needs a team to deal with that.

AP: So, to sum up, you don't see a change in the way the CPT does business, but you want more.

AS: Yes, more. To try to drill down and get involved more wherever possible where we're missing out. I don't think we need to change, we just need to be more involved.

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CV SHOW '07

Simply unmissable

The 2007 Commercial Vehicle and Automotive Trade Show at the NEC from April 24-26 once again promises to exceed previous records. Martin Cole takes a look at who's there

Well over 600 exhibitors are already booked in and the event is one that should not be missed. There is virtually a day's work involved in examining all the minibus product - mainly manufacturer's own in-house developments or those created by their official conversion partners. Added to that, there is a plethora of stands displaying products or services common to both the HGV and PSV sectors - from workshop tools and equipment to fleet management software packages.

At a specially organised press preview, 51 exhibitors announced preview material of what will be on show. Some of this *CBW* covered in the last issue of *Minibus*, but the remainder listed here is specific to operators of larger vehicles.

Exhaust and emission specialist **Eminox** expects keen interest in ways to meet the requirements of the London Low Emission Zone by upgrading exhaust systems to employ Continuously Regenerating Traps. The company has also been involved in extensive trials of Fuel Borne Catalysts - fuel additives designed to work with the CRT to efficiently reduce trapped particulate matter to a harmless ash. The latest systems also use glowplugs to help ignite the gases and raise temperatures within the catalysts for greater efficiency.

Marketing director Mike Galey said the company would be revamping its website to offer advice when the LEZ consultation has concluded. Once the proposed figures have been finalised the company will respond accordingly by carrying detailed explanations of the new regulations and how Eminox systems will be able to help some of the older vehicles achieve compliance.

Mr Galey added that Eminox had been approached to act as host to a number of regional focus groups. He said there had already been over 600 enquiries from coach operators about upgrading Euro 2 vehicles to meet the minimum Euro 3 LEZ requirement.

With accident statistics showing the current average of bridge strikes by double deckers to have grown to one per week, **Bridgeclear** says there is convincing evidence operators should install its Bridgeclear warning device to cut the number of incidents and reduce the risk to passengers.

Some bus companies have made the device standard across their fleets, but the highest proportion of incidents now comes from rail replacement services where badly-planned routes can be issued to drivers who are often not familiar with the hazards of driving high vehicles. To improve the situation, Bridgeclear is producing navigation software for the UK and Ireland which can interface with a number of low-cost commercially available SatNav systems, such as the Becker or the highly acclaimed TomTom, and will provide low bridge warnings. Alternatively, the system can run in a hand-held PDA. It also has the ability to automatically plan routes avoiding these hazards. Other features include routing around roads with weight restrictions and, to some extent, width restrictions.

> BRIDGECLEAR CAN INTERFACE WITH SATNAV SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE LOW BRIDGE WARNINGS

The company said the width restriction element was not fully comprehensive, but it was being added to all the time and customers would be able to update the information as and when it became available. The advanced system is being officially launched at the show.

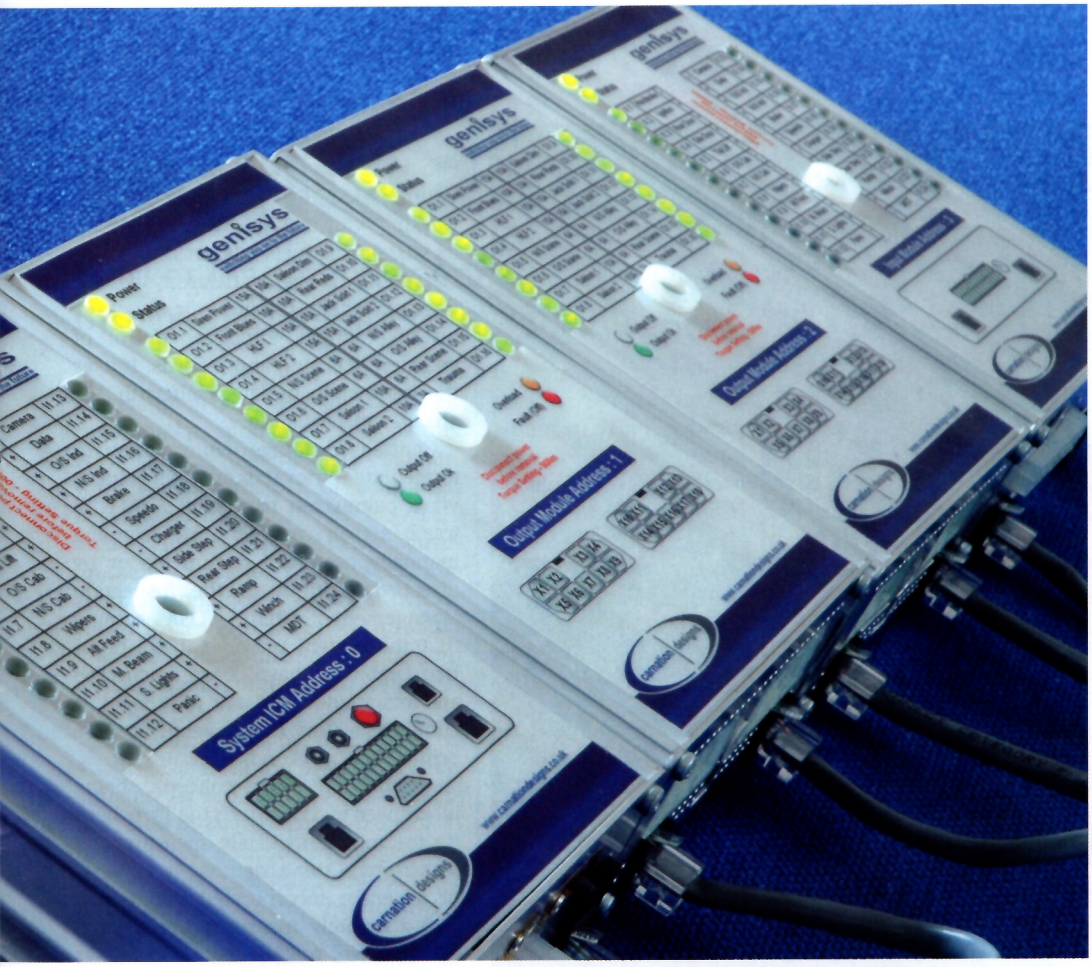
BFi Optilas manufactures specialised track and trace system hardware to provide vehicle location and communication alongside data recording. It is claimed to be compatible with communications software from a number of leading suppliers and has already been evaluated, approved and installed by a leading express coach service provider in the UK.

The company says the range of products allows operators to determine the hardware system that best suits their own application and then to include the specific software mapping they prefer - GPS, GPRS or others designed to their own specification. The system provides totally private network operation.

Intellitec will be unveiling a range of new products, including an ultracapacitor that can provide engine cranking power without the need for a battery. The company says this is ideal for the accessible transport market, where passenger lift use is extensive, or leisure travel where the vehicle is subject to a high electrical drain to run air conditioning, catering or entertainment systems which can deplete conventional batteries quickly. The ultracapacitor would allow operators to fit deep-cycle batteries more suited to steady but extensive power output which don't have the ability to provide the surge of cold cranking power required for effective starting.

The ultracapacitor is supplied with a quick charge system and it has the

Above: genisys control modules can be linked together. Right: Go-Ahead's London operations under pence/mile contact with Michelin. Below: Bridgeclear can now link with SatNav systems



option to be used as a mobile slave starter unit for other vehicles.

Intellitec will also unveil its new CANbus multiplex system which is a 'next generation' design equipped with CANlink, allowing it to take more information from the chassis and body - a useful feature for the vehicle manufacturers. It also interfaces with a multifunction display. The company hopes to have vehicles fitted with the new system operational ahead of the show and will be demonstrating its capabilities on the stand.

Also new is the Xantrex service agent which will support a range of chargers and inverters - with the opportunity to employ solar power.

Michelin will be promoting its two newest tyres, which were launched at Euro Bus Expo last year. The 'X in City' is a dedicated urban bus tyre with a high resistance to scrubbing and extremely strong sidewall reinforcement to protect the casing against damage from kerbs. The tyre is available only as a 275 70 22.5 at present.

For coaches, the latest Michelin is the X Coach XD, which is designed for drive axle application. It is a development of the popular XDA 4 and is engineered to give greater mileage and reduced noise. It is presently only available as a 295 80 22.5 but other sizes will be made available in due course. They carry the

M&S markings to show their European compliance for use on winter tours and skiing holidays.

Michelin said its new tyre compounds have been evolved without compromise to rolling resistance or adhesion, ensuring better grip without a wear penalty.

Michelin believes branding the tyre with the 'Coach' label will assure customers their tyres are developed for the purpose and not a straight steal from the truck market. It will also be promoting its regrooving service which allows properly managed tyres to offer four lifetimes. According to Michelin, this means more time is spent running the tyre at its optimum condition to achieve better fuel consumption and reduced overall costs.

Carnation Designs will be launching genisys, its branded suite of programmable vehicle management systems. Aimed at converters and end users, it is claimed to deliver a previously unattainable level of configuration and operability within the specialist vehicle sector and is suited to supporting software-driven notice boards and destination signage.

Employing solid state technology, genisys is fully programmable and highly versatile. Each module has 24 digital inputs plus a CANbus link. Up to 16 units can be connected together.

Basing genisys around solid-state technology removes the requirement for hard-wired relays and fuses, with protection thresholds being set in the easy-to-follow software programme. This greatly reduces fitment time and significantly increases flexibility.

The genisys electronic control module is an intelligent node that digests and sends protocols to the numerous user interfaces and output modules, which can be multiplexed around the vehicle. With each output module capable of distributing and controlling 150amps, genisys has the flexibility and intelligence to monitor and manage all auxiliary electrical requirements.

> BRANDING A TYRE WITH THE 'COACH' LABEL ASSURES CUSTOMERS IT IS DEVELOPED FOR PURPOSE

FleetHorizon, the latest fleet management development from **cfc solutions**, is based on proven technology contained in its FleetPlus software for larger fleets. It is a complete solution capable of managing all vehicle operations on a day-to-day basis and designed to help fleets meet their O licence and drivers' hours responsibilities. The company says it has a high level of appeal for public sector organisations through its ability to track key performance indicators.

FleetHorizon allows management of all driver, vehicle and other asset records, as well as fuel and maintenance spending. Reports can be generated and the software will automatically alert the user to any exceptions. The software can also be configured to measure KPIs useful to public sector fleet operations where 'best value' rules are applied.

Tyrecheck, from Truckfile, automatically analyses and records tread depth

FleetHorizon allows tracking of all O licence and drivers' hours factors, and will flag up when legal responsibilities are not being fulfilled. It will also fully integrate with cfc's Driver Hours Module, which allows drivers to 'clock on' via a dedicated in-vehicle device or by interfacing with digital tachographs or telematic systems. The module also supports multiple drivers using the same vehicle.

Antares, the auxiliary electrical systems specialist, is showing its latest Power Manager system. The company developed it for Sprinter-based conversions and it employs an electronic 'virtual alternator' to help manage the electrical load. The unit allows fast charging of all batteries independently of the original alternator, completely managing power distribution which is now essential on Euro 4 platforms.

Eclipse is promoting its Italian-made Texa multi-make diagnostic tools that simplify life for technicians dealing with mixed vehicle fleets. The system is contained in a hand-held tablet PC with a touch screen. It connects to a vehicle's on-board diagnostics to check for faults throughout the vehicle systems in seconds - identifying problems from brake and suspension faults to engine management issues and showing what needs to be done. It can also transmit live data to support adjustments to parts or systems. The company also offers a PDA-based version.

> YOU CAN GET TREAD DEPTH READINGS FROM ANY OF THE FLEET'S VEHICLES ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD

Countrywide Energy is to launch a new fuel card offering all the cost advantages of bunkered fuel but with none of the hassle. It will offer sophisticated monitoring, covering either an individual driver or vehicle. Countrywide also confirmed that it is working with new partners to develop its sustainable fuels business.

Truckfile is a new software system for fleet managers, repairers or operators offering simple, effective control of vehicles, licensing and records. It uses the internet to update itself with any changes in legislation.

Centralised storage of information for immediate retrieval or analysis is input via a palm-sized hand-held PDA with touch screen capability, by scanning manually produced documents or by direct data input to the Inspection Management System. VOSA accepts that the system provides 100% proof that vehicles have been inspected and maintained and are fully legal. A complete history of any vehicle can be printed out in seconds.

Another new concept being introduced by Truckfile is the Tyrecheck device to automatically measure and record tyre tread depths. It consists of a sensor incorporated into a mat that accurately measures tread depth as the wheel rolls over it. It examines the readings it receives and compares them against data from a new tyre. The readings cover the entire width of the tread and can inform operators of excessive or uneven wear patterns.

Mats can be positioned anywhere and because each one can be connected to the internet it is possible to get the readings from any of the fleet's vehicles anywhere in the world. Tyres are uniquely identified by an electronic tag as they approach the mat and the readings directed through Truckfile. Emails can be ordered to report any tyres approaching unserviceable or minimum tread depth specifications set by the operator.

The Ipswich Mercedes-Benz dealership, Outwell Truck and Van, is one of the many of the dealership networks changing to Truckfile. Aftersales director, Steve Webb, explained: "VOSA likes operators to have copies of safety inspection sheets immediately. Previously we were copying them and faxing them to the customer, then posting the original later. Now that inspection sheets can be uploaded from the web, it has cut a lot of time. We don't have to search filing cabinets for lost records, which is a major saving, and since the trial began we haven't lost a single inspection sheet. I estimate we will be saving hundreds of pounds in postage and stationary costs each year."

Service and Support

Market leading air conditioning supplier Carrier Sutrak has overhauled its operator support structure. Andy Sutcliffe reports

Northampton-based bus and coach air conditioning supplier Carrier Sutrak is revamping its operator support with a new structure of contracted network partners.

At a launch with its five newly signed-up network partners last week, the company outlined its new structure, which it clearly believes will position it as the number one supplier of both air conditioning product and support in the UK.

Company managing director, Peter Adams, explained to *CBW* that the new structure, which goes live this week, is the result of taking a long hard look at the company's existing arrangements and also incorporating best practice from the truck side of the worldwide Carrier business.

"We started in 1985," explained Mr Adams, "the first dedicated bus and coach air conditioning supplier in the UK and we then ran ten mobile units which we administered from Northampton.

"There were times during the peak season where you simply couldn't cope with the number of calls and that caused problems with operators because you couldn't get there in time. So we made changes. We supplemented the ten vans with independent service centres, we went to people we trusted, and they came on board and filled in the gaps. But we found it was difficult to administer, the independents had other activities. It worked, but not as well as it should have done. We couldn't go for a 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year contact for the operator.

"So we moved to a full independent service network; 32 companies that were contracted to us and they were administered by a call centre, so there was one number for the operator to call. Which was then directed to the nearest service centre. That's worked reasonably well. It has allowed us to meet most operator demands. But what it doesn't do is build a relationship between us, Carrier, and the operators. And we've found that the relationship that we used to have in the early days when we were running our own service vans is missing. You'd get to know the operator, their vehicles; you'd get to know their particular requirements. And they'd get to know you.

> THERE WERE TIMES DURING THE PEAK SEASON WHEN WE COULDN'T COPE... SO WE MADE CHANGES

The new Network Partners. From right to left: Matt Williams, Phil Walters (Cool Solution Refrigeration), Adrian Poile (Faygate Air Conditioning), Jon Bernstein (Bernstein Engineering), Peter Adams, Graham Ransome, Neil Gedny (Ransome Engineering), Eric Stott, Justin Stott (Airconco).

"So we've now moved to a network partner arrangement that we believe will address all of the issues. It's not a new idea - we've taken out truck/trailer model, having regional partners responsible for a particular territory. But companies that aren't simply independent companies, they are contracted very closely to Carrier, we operate as one family. The vans are branded as Carrier vans, the whole appearance is of one company.

"We've spent a lot of time selecting companies which either have a good established bus business or are exhibiting the sort of dynamism and commitment we need."

The criteria for selecting the partners has been carefully set out, the chosen companies must:

- Maintain a comprehensive stock of spare parts for resale and service use, with particular emphasis on vehicle types within region.
- Maintain a skilled and properly-trained workforce for service provision.
- Maintain properly-equipped service support vehicles.
- Train a Senior Engineer as a mentor for other engineers and a reference for technical information.
- Build a supplementary network of contracted sub-dealers to ensure national cover.
- Work within the Carrier systems to provide a national standard.
- Ensure that all work is carried out in accordance with correct procedures and conforming with Health & Safety and environmental legislation.

At the centre of the operation is the Carrier Assist call centre. Operators will have a single phone number contact to deal with breakdowns, regular servicing, maintenance and warranty work. As Peter Adams explained: "It's all controlled by Carrier Assist, a new company started in January last year. It's solely operated for and on behalf of Carrier; it doesn't do any call support for anybody else.

"It was primarily set up for truck/trailer and it's state of the art, everything is digitally recorded, it also carries all of

CARRIER SUTRAK

THE NETWORK PARTNERS

NORTH WALES & NORTHERN ENGLAND
Airconco
Airconco is an established parts and service provider based at Middleton near Manchester. Established in 1996 Airconco has extensive experience and has been working with Carrier Sutrak since 2002, its wide customer base and reputation for prompt action makes it an ideal northern England partner.
Contact: Eric Stott.
Tel: 0845 402 4014.
E-mail: *eric@airconco.net*

CENTRAL ENGLAND
Bernstein Engineering
The first independent Carrier Sutrak service centre. Appointed in 1986 with a wealth of bus and coach Industry experience. With its recent move to Aylesbury and the enhanced workshop facility Carrier regards Bernstein Engineering as a strong and immensely capable central England partner.
Contact: Jon Bernstein.
Tel: 01296 395889.
E-mail: *jon.bernstein@btconnect.com*

EAST OF ENGLAND
Ransome Engineering
Ransome Engineering, established in 1981 as a Carrier Transicold refrigeration Network Partner. Ransome Engineering is developing a bus and coach division and brings its extensive engineering workshops and service support team to the party. Based near Ipswich, Ransome Engineering offers a wide range of services and extensive air conditioning experience to operators.
Contact: Graham Ransome.
Tel: 01473 737731.
E-mail: *graham@ransomeengineering.co.uk*

SOUTHERN EAST ENGLAND
Faygate Air Conditioning
After becoming a service provider for Carrier Sutrak in 2005, Faygate has rapidly expanded its customer base across south London and south east England. A move to larger new premises now underway enables a south east England spare parts centre and service workshop.
Contact: Adrian Poile.
Tel: 0771 1016249.
E-mail: *adrianpoile@aol.com*

SOUTH WALES AND SOUTH WEST ENGLAND
Cool Solution Refrigeration
A new young dynamic company established by a team with extensive experience in bus and coach air conditioning. The move to new workshops in Cardiff enables a new regional parts and service centre feeding field based engineers throughout the south-west England and South Wales and a local parts centre for Welsh operators.
Contact: Matthew Williams.
Tel: 02920 493111.
E-mail: *mattwilliams7212@hotmail.co.uk*

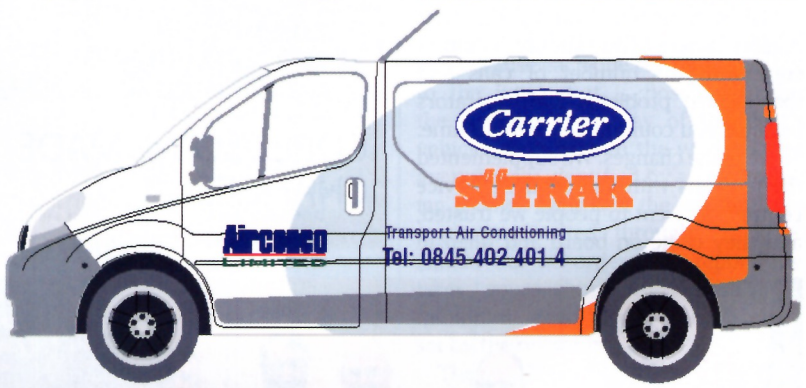
Carrier Sutrack
io Centre, Lodge Farm Industrial Estate, Northampton, NN5 7UW. **Tel:** 01604 581468. **Web:** *www.suetrack.com*

the truck/trailer details and will shortly carry all of the Carrier Sutrak coach and bus vehicle details. The bus and coach operator has one number to call and they will connect in to the network partner. The communication is between the operator and Carrier Assist. The system logs the incident, records it all digitally; it can take credit card payments, so if you haven't got an account it doesn't matter - we can still deal with it and it carries all the vehicle records for all the vehicles under contract maintenance. So there's no delay in getting warranty or contract work done."

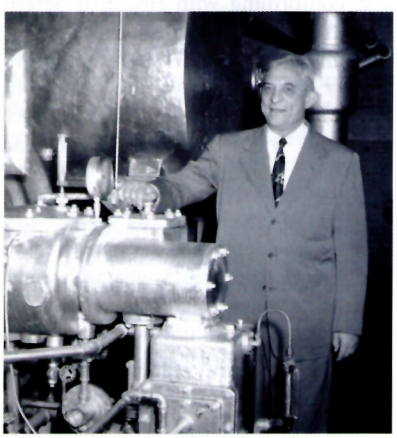
The call centre is located in Huddersfield and is manned 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, with a minimum of two operators. In addition, Carrier Assist handles the web-based Electronic Claims Submission (ECS) system. It records all system detail, parts pricing, in scope warranty systems and job times. Warranty is processed in a paperless system enabling warranty claims to be cleared quickly. The website also gives Network Partners access to all system records, parts lists and wiring diagrams so that service vans no longer need volumes of books, simply an ability to access the site. Service bulletins and feedback information is also posted.

> THE SYSTEM ENSURES THERE'S NO DELAY IN GETTING WARRANTY OR CONTRACT WORK DONE

One of Peter Adams' major priorities is to establish exactly what air conditioning units are in operation in the UK and who has them! The company has introduced a free post-delivery check for all operators aimed at making sure all new units are fully operational and further ensuring that the units are recorded on Carrier's central database.



The network partners' vans will be fully liveried with Carrier Sutrak branding



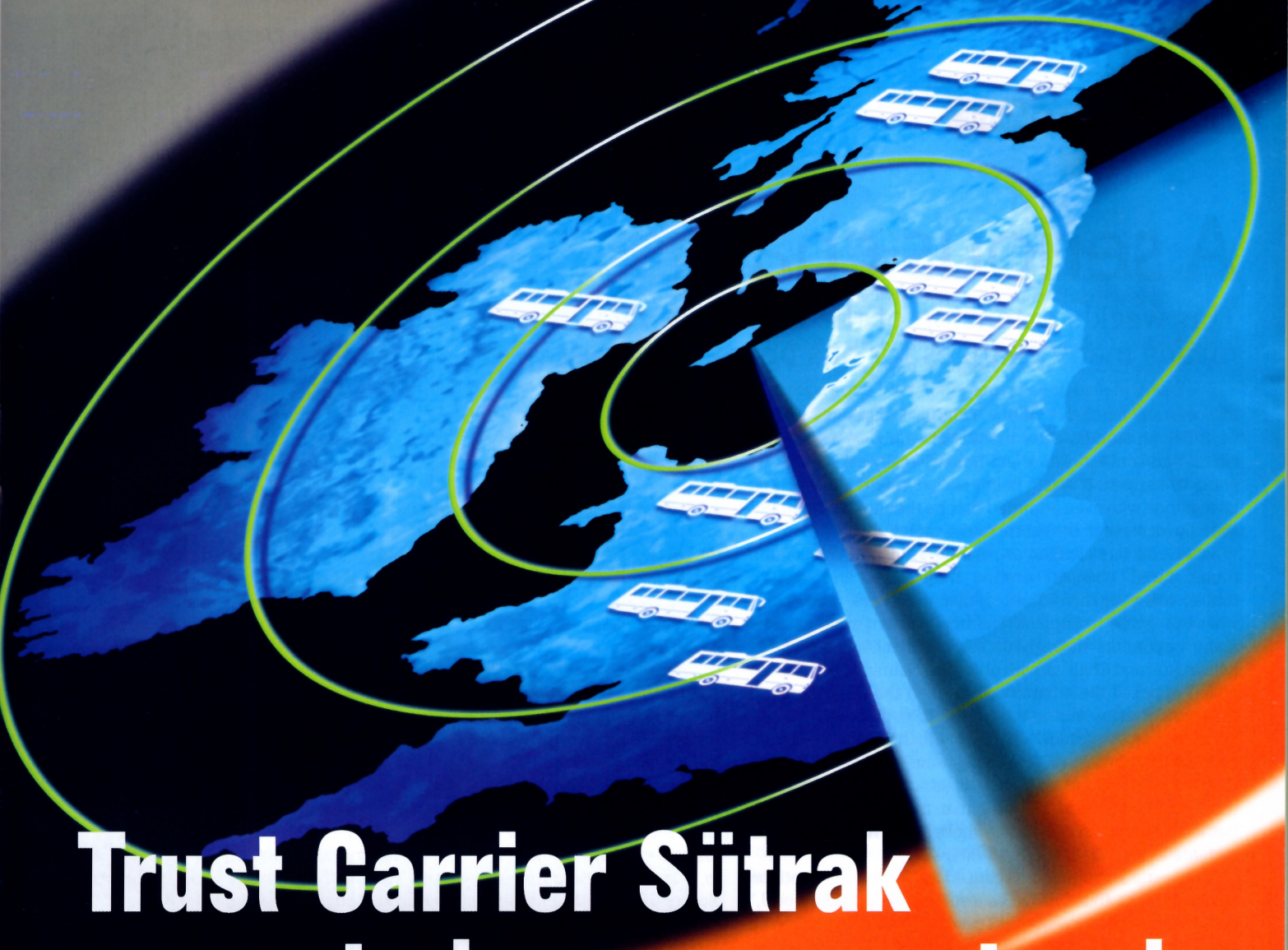
WILLIS CARRIER

Carrier Sutrak is part of the American Carrier corporation, named after its founder Willis Carrier (left), regarded as the father of air conditioning.

Born in Angola in western New York in 1876, in 1895 Willis Carrier received a scholarship to Cornell University and graduated in 1901 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Following college, he went to work for the Buffalo Forge Company, which manufactured heaters, blowers and air exhaust systems, in their heating engineering department designing heating systems to dry lumber and coffee.

Willis Carrier and several other engineers formed the Carrier Engineering Corporation in 1915 with capital of $35,000. Carrier's early work in developing centrifugal refrigeration machines led to new safe refrigerants for which he also received several patents. By controlling humidity as well as temperature, he invented air conditioning as we know it today. By all accounts Carrier was an enlightened employer, believing in teamwork and mentoring decades before management consultants coined the terms, as well as being reportedly modest, funny, far-sighted and exceptionally nice!

Now part of the UTC Corporation, Carrier employs almost 45,000 people and has an annual turnover of $12.5billion. The company can boast an astonishing number of industry 'firsts' including first air-conditioned office building, cinema, boat, public bus and home. Willis Carrier died aged 73 in 1950. His importance as an inventor was recognised by *Time* magazine when he was named as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century.



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East	**01473 737 731**	Ransome Engineering Services (Ipswich)
Midlands & South England	**01296 395 889**	Bernstein Engineering (Aylesbury)
South East	**0771 101 6249**	Faygate Air Conditioning (Crawley)
South Wales South West England	**02920 493 111**	Cool Solution Refrigeration (Cardiff)
North Wales North East England	**0845 402 4014**	Airconco, Middleton (Greater Manchester)
Scotland	**01563 541 178**	H-VAC Services (Kilmarnock)
Northern Ireland	**028 8775 0111**	Principal Cooling (Dungannon)
Eire	**00353 872 634534**	Vehicle Air Conditioning (Castleblaney)

Carrier

SÜTRAK

Carrier Sütrak, Transport Air Conditioning, Heating and Ventilation, io Centre, Lodge Farm Industrial Estate, Northampton NN5 7UW

CONGESTION CHARGE

A serious charge

This week's extension of the London Congestion Charge Zone means many changes for bus operators. Peter Brown reports

The western extension of the London Congestion Charge went live on Monday after months of wrangles, arguments, claims and counter-claims and nobody really sure what was going to happen. It was a helter-skelter ride for mayor Ken Livingstone who even admitted that he thought traffic would actually increase in the centre of the capital.

As several bus companies running Transport for London routes faced changed service frequencies and revised routes, many openly admitted that they were unaware of what was going to happen. The new western zone has had many opponents throughout such affluent areas such as Kensington and Chelsea, with objectors claiming 70% of those polled opposed the scheme and claimed the mayor ignored the views of many during the consultation process.

Defending congestion charging which began in central London in February 2003, Livingstone claimed last week that it did work and described it as a success recognised throughout the world. He said that traffic was down 20% but later was to reveal that he thought traffic levels would increase as a result of the zone extension.

"Congestion charging has reduced traffic in central London by around 20% and is hailed as a success around the world," he told a press conference on Tuesday. "It has also delivered real improvements to air quality, reduced CO_2 emissions, enhanced safety for pedestrians and cyclists and improved the reliability of the bus network.

"London is the only major city in the world that has seen a shift to public transport from private car use. Without congestion charging, central London would almost certainly have ground to a halt by now. This said, the planning and carrying out of street works is extremely chaotic and is now having a negative impact on the effectiveness of the measures brought in to tackle congestion."

Mayor Livingstone used the conference to publicly announce that he was putting pressure on the Government to regulate co-ordination with legislation to prevent the chaos that regularly ensues. That aside, last year's TfL Congestion Charging Fourth Annual Report recorded a 22% reduction in congestion, relative to pre-charging levels, down from 30% in 2003 when congestion charging was introduced.

The provisional estimate for the reduction in congestion within the central London zone for 2006 is eight per cent. The report states this rise in congestion coincides with a marked increase in roadworks. Without the introduction of the charging TfL claims central London would have experienced much higher levels of traffic and congestion.

Carefully-tuned listeners to London's local radio stations on Wednesday morning would have woken up to the voice of Darren Johnson, a London Assembly member of the Green Party, castigating the mayor for introducing a scheme that would actually increase congestion. Johnson said he and his party were in favour of the charge, but the way it was being implemented was wrong.

Buying the right to travel in the now widened zone meant that residents living in somewhere like Notting Hill Gate would have the incentive to drive further into central London, therefore creating congestion. He said the current £8 daily charge should be for each zone.

Some hours later, the mayor and TfL officials admitted to *CBW* that they were expecting congestion to rise following this week's extension of the charge. "A congestion rise of 4.5% on current levels is expected in the existing zone," insisted Livingstone, but one of his officials responsible for the Congestion Charge said he thought drivers would eventually be deterred by the high cost of parking in central London.

"Potentially the increase expected is because people having paid for the charge near to home will take the car further into London which is the existing zone," said the official. "Huge amounts will still be required for payment because the high cost of parking in that area. With the cost of this policy it still makes sense to hop on a bus in the zone and we think people will see that."

Travel London has won the contract for the only new route to come out of the changes. In fact the 452 has been running since Saturday December 2 in preparation for the Congestion Charge extension. Running between Kensal Rise station to Wandsworth Road station it goes via Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill Gate and Kensington to Knightsbridge, following route 52.

From there it follows the 137 route via Sloane Square and Chelsea Bridge to the junction of Queenstown Road and Wandsworth Bridge Road to terminate at Wandsworth Road station. It is seen as playing a major role in transporting passengers through the extended zone.

"These buses run every seven to eight minutes during the daytime on Monday to Saturday and every 12 minutes on Sunday," a Travel London spokesman explained. "Buses run between 05.05 and 23.55 on Monday to Saturday and 05.15 and 23.55 on Sunday.

"The route is operated from our Battersea garage originally using 20 Dennis Tridents double-deck buses. New Enviro 400 double-decks meeting the latest Euro 4 emission standards were introduced early in the New Year. It is somewhat early days to say what might happen in the new or existing zone."

Changes for buses

Many bus companies are involved in the changes. The London General arm of Go Ahead runs the 44 service which has been re-routed to run to Victoria station together with the N44 which runs to Aldwych. Its 239 route from Clapham Junction to Victoria now runs more frequently throughout the week.

More buses have been scheduled for London General's 14 route from Putney Heath to Tottenham Court Road which has been extended to Warren Street and has an increased frequency. Its 22 service (Putney Common to Piccadilly Circus) and 27 (Turnham Green to Chalk Farm) have also had their frequencies increased.

Three Metroline services are involved. The 52 has an additional journey during the busiest hour of the morning peak.

> LONDON IS THE ONLY MAJOR CITY IN THE WORLD THAT HAS SEEN A SHIFT TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT USE

The 16 between Cricklewood and Victoria now runs more frequently during the week and the 46 has been extended from Warwick Avenue to Lancaster Gate via Paddington.

Allowing for increased usage, Arriva London's 319 route from Streatham Hill to Sloane Square now operates with double-deckers to carry a much higher number of passengers. Travel London's 344 from Clapham Junction to Liverpool Street is now running more frequently throughout the week and is operating on a 24-hour basis. Its C3 - Clapham Junction to Earl's Court - has an increased frequency throughout the week.

Transdev, operating the number 9 under the London United banner between Aldwych and Hammersmith, the 10 between Hammersmith and Kings Cross and route 11 from Fulham Broadway to Liverpool Street, now has additional services in the morning peak. Route 94 between Acton Green and Piccadilly Circus also has an additional morning peak time journey.

Journeys are also affected on First operations. The 31 - Camden Town to Notting Hill Gate - has been extended to Shepherd's Bush Green; the 18 (Sudbury to Euston) now runs more frequently; the 23 (Westbourne Park to Liverpool Street) is now running to Westbourne Park via Elkstone Road instead of approximately half the service terminating at Sainsbury's, Ladbroke Grove; and the 328 (Golders Green to Chelsea), also has a greater frequency.

So what do the companies think about the changes? Some were reluctant to talk to us, saying as our questions came under the heading of "operational matters" it was TfL who should be commenting. Others were more forthcoming, although most were obviously quite reluctant to prophecy on what effect the extended Congestion Charge was going have on bus services.

However, a spokeswoman at Go Ahead for London General was very upbeat and optimistic about the changes. She said passengers and operators were going to benefit greatly.

"Our services have improved quite substantially," she said. "Seven routes have been affected and we are working 19 extra buses in consultation with TfL. We have extra journeys on some routes, many frequency increases, extensions and diversions.

"We won't know the impact for some time to come, but these clearly are improvements and they have come to coincide with the extension of the Congestion Charge."

Clarity of the outcome of the extended charge area on bus services is also unclear at Metroline, where spokesman Phil Schafe was happy to reveal that a couple of its services had been enhanced.

"A couple of our routes have been enhanced," he said. "The 237 is only on the edge of the zone but is a fully important route which has seen its service increased between Hounslow Heath and Shepherd's Bush. The 46 from Farringdon Street to Warwick Avenue has been extended via Paddington to Lancaster Gate.

"We don't know what will actually happen. The main Edgware Road will be interesting; this is where we run quite a few routes and is on the edge of the new zone."

There is far more optimism at TfL, where the extension of the Congestion Charge zone is seen as an ideal way of extolling the virtues of public transport, particularly bus services. David Brown, managing director of surface transport at TfL, claimed this week that this has been an excellent opportunity to improve routes and frequencies.

"We aim to improve and expand the transport network, making it more reliable and encouraging more people to use public transport," he announced. "London is the only major city in the world to have achieved a significant shift from private car use to buses and other modes of transport.

"We intend to build on this success through continued investment. The changes in west London mean nearly 5,000 more people will be able to travel in and around the zone in the morning rush hour.

"Changes include a new service, the route 452 between Kensal Rise and Wandsworth Road station, and extensions to other routes as well as more frequent services across the network. These come on top of improvements to the bus network in the last six years, including an accessible fleet of over 8,000 buses, professionally-trained drivers, a better waiting environment at bus stops and shelters and improved security with all our buses fitted with CCTV cameras."

The Congestion Charge extension has now arrived in west London - namely Bayswater, Notting Hill, North and South Kensington, High Street Kensington, Knightsbridge, Chelsea, Belgravia and Pimlico.

Some thought prior to February 2003 that London would never see the Congestion Charge implemented. With the extension now operational, the questions that have to be answered are where to next... and is the bus industry ready for yet more change?

WHERE TO NEXT? AND IS THE BUS INDUSTRY READY FOR YET MORE CHANGE?

MENTOR

Top: The Mentor used line-up. Above: Brands on display

The Rental Game

Mentor Coach and Bus used its annual open day to announce the introduction of a rental side to the business. Andy Sutcliffe reports.

Well known coach dealer and importer Mentor Coach and Bus is to launch its own rental business next month.

At the company's recent two day trade open day event, marketing man Griff Jackson-Irving told *CBW* that the addition of a rental arm to the company's portfolio was a natural progression for the Hellaby, South Yorkshire-based business. With a comprehensive stock of new and used vehicles the company is perfectly positioned to offer operators a variety of vehicles at a wide range of hire rates. In addition giving coach operators the chance to 'try before they buy'.

Mr Jackson-Irving explained that the Mentor programme will allow operators to both try vehicles before buying as well as allowing them to satisfy short-term contracts with a high quality vehicle without having to make a full purchase.

Experienced vehicle rental specialist Paul Tapping has been hired by Mentor to oversee the new rental business. With a background in the car rental market, Paul has spent the last few months setting up the business and dealing with the background systems needed to ensure the company can give operators a first class service.

> ADDITIONALLY OPERATORS WERE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SPECIAL OPEN DAY PRICES ON PARTS

The Mentor open days saw the company put on a fine display of new and used vehicles, as well as providing expert help to the many operators who made the trip to Hellaby. Test drives were available and after the event the company reported that it had sold three vehicles over the course of the two days and was expecting another 3-5 sales because of the event. Vehicle finance specialists Alliance and Leicester were on hand to provide quotes for operators.

Additionally operators were able to take advantage of special open day prices on a wide range of parts and accessories.

Stars of the event were the Euro 4 MAN Tourliners, with deliveries of 12m 49-seaters and 13.8m 61-seaters due early April and the new MAN Noge Catalan Star (right).

The company plans to hold additional regional events later on in the year.

Mentor held a prize draw during the event, with the chance to win a holiday for two to New York as the prize. Details of the winners will be announced next week.

■ Details. Mentor Coach and Bus Ltd. Tel: 01709 700600. *www.mentorplc.com*

The Mentor open day was the first real sighting of the new MAN Noge Catalan Star. First seen at Euro Bus Expo in an all white livery, the consensus in the *CBW* office was that the addition of a solid colour brings out the good looks of this striking vehicle. Fitted with a MAN D 2866 LOH engine and AS Tronic gearbox, the vehicle pictured here, the first in the UK, was fitted with 53 reclining Noge seats, air conditioning, fridge, DVD with two monitors, centre sunken toilet and servery. This vehicle had only just arrived in the UK and was making its debut at the event, but is now available for operator evaluations. Actual delivery dates on new Euro 4 Catalan Stars are as yet not finalised.

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

STAGECOACH

Stagecoach in Warwickshire has started operating five Scania Omnicitys on behalf of Warwickshire County Council. The 41-seaters were built to council specification, making them fully lowfloor, with destination equipment and wheelchair access.

Engineering director Mike Bishop is pleased with the early impression they have made around the route in Nuneaton. He says: "It is still very early, but the drivers seem happy with them. We had all our drivers trained on the vehicles before we put them into service, so they are all familiar. With them being Euro 4 they are better for passengers and better for the environment too.
We have only been running them for a matter of days, but they certainly seem up to the job."

The Omnicitys replaced Volvo B10Ms that used to operate on the 20-mile route that runs from Nuneaton to a new interchange at Coleshill and then on to the railway terminal by Birmingham International Airport and the NEC.

They feature the Scania DC9 engine, producing 230bhp running through a ZF fully-automatic transmission.

Operator rating: 8/10 "It's still early days but we are looking forward to seeing how they perform."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Scania Omnicity (integral)
Engine Scania DC9 230bhp
Transmission ZF auto
Seats 41
Spec Destination equipment, wheelchair bay
Supplied by Scania Bus & Coach 01908 210210

IPSWICH BUSES

Six Scania Omnicity single deck buses have entered service with Ipswich Buses. With a seating capacity of 36 plus 40 standees, the new buses have been allocated to the Ipswich Town network on route 13, which runs every ten minutes and links the town centre with the railway station and the Tesco store at Copdock.

The buses feature a bright new livery, which is believed to be the first use of pearlescent paint on a bus in the UK, while internally they feature a new layout, which includes Esteban Civic leather seats, additional leg room and air conditioning. The Omnicitys come with the DC9 engine, producing 230bhp, running through a ZF fully-automatic transmission.

Managing director, Malcom Robson, says: "These are the first of a new series of second generation

METROBUS

A pair of Optare Solos has entered service with Metrobus of Orpington – part of the Go-Ahead Group. Based at the company's depot in Orpington, Kent, the Solos are making easy work of a largely rural route that also takes them in and out of town.

The 7.4 metre SlimLine Solos are running on the hourly R8 service, which connects local villages and a large housing estate at Biggin Hill with Orpington shopping centre and the town's mainline railway station. At 17 seats plus standees, the Solo is proving to be a good size to cope with fluctuations in demand throughout the day.

Tim Pinkney, assistant operations manager at Metrobus in Orpington, says feedback from drivers to the Solos has so far been very positive.

"They regard them as a nice drive," he explains. "The fact that even though they are small, they have many big bus features, also adds to their appeal."

Dominic Moorhouse, the company's engineering director, adds: "Though these are not our first Optare Solos, this delivery is a first for

lowfloor buses for our town network, replacing the Optare Excels which were our first lowfloor buses on route 13 in 1997.

"The Scania Ominicity has created a visual impact in and around Ipswich town centre and with no other changes in the operation of the service, apart from new vehicles, we have in the first week seen a growth in passengers numbers on this service of over 4%. The passengers certainly seem delighted with them."

Operator rating: 8/10 "The drivers are very happy with them; we've certainly had no negative feedback."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Scania Omnicity (integral)
Engine Scania DC9 230bhp
Transmission ZF auto
Seats 36
Spec Esteban Civic leather seating
Supplied by Scania Bus & Coach 01908 210210

Metrobus - our first EGR Euro 4s, and our first MAN-engined buses. With a sizeable Scania fleet, it made us favour EGR technology - the direction that both Scania and MAN are taking.

"From a maintenance perspective, it's early days for Euro 4 EGR technology, but the Solos have excellent accessibility to the engine compartment, which has proved popular with the engineers."

Those big bus features include ample power at 177 bhp (132 kW) from the MAN engine, an Allison 2010 five-speed fully automatic transmission and an integral KLAM electro-magnetic retarder. All-round air suspension ensures a comfortable ride and the front kneeling capability gives the Solo a low entry height of just 200mm - the lowest of any bus currently on British roads.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo (integral)
Engine MAN 4.8litre
Transmission Allison 2010 five-speed auto
Seats 17
Spec Euro 4
Supplied by Optare 0870 0330005

McELLIGOTT COACHES

McElligott Coaches of Co Limerick, Eire has bought a new Volvo B12B Jonckheere Mistral, which it plans to use for tour work when the summer season kicks in.

The new coach marks a return to Volvo after several years for McElligott.

The new vehicle, which features Volvo's DH12D engine, rated at 420bhp coupled to the I-Shift automatic gearbox, will be used on tours all over Ireland on behalf of CIE, and its high spec interior ensures that passengers can enjoy the views in comfort.

The 49-seater features full climate control, toilet, TV/DVD player and facilities for hot and cold drinks.

It is the first B12B to join McElligott's 16-strong mixed fleet and the first Volvo for seven years.

Company managing director, Mike McElligott said: "We were looking for high standards in terms of performance and passenger comfort. I'd heard very positive reports of the B12B from other operators in the industry and it was that, together with the persuasive charms of James Hyde of Volvo Bus, which convinced me to return to Volvo!"

Family-run McElligott Coaches was established in 1975.

In addition to CIE tours, the company provides a variety of services including golfing breaks, airport transfers, corporate and school outings, weddings, sporting events, pilgrimages

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Jonckheere Mistral
Engine Volvo DH12D 420bhp
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 49
Spec Toilet, TV/DVD player
Supplied by Volvo Bus 01509 217777

BLUE IRIS COACHES

Blue Iris Coaches has put another new Optimo V minicoach into service, the second of its kind for the operator after buying one in 2005. The latest addition means six of the seven-strong fleet are on 12m chassis, and the whole fleet is made up of Optimo's, ranging from 18 to 24-seaters.

The new coach is a 22-seater GL with Sutrak air conditioning. The seats are luxurious Fainsa recliners in a 2-plus-2 formation and the coach also features full draw curtains, individual reading lights and full interior soft trim.

Blue Iris, based in Bristol, has been established for more than 50 years and runs coaches on private and corporate hire as well as for contracts with local schools. Phil Hatherall, director at Blue Iris, said: "I can't fault the vehicles, especially with air conditioning, they fit the purpose perfectly. Our client base is such that there is no better vehicle around for us to run. Not only on the corporate side of things, but also for private hire. We get phone calls from customers simply because they know we run the Optimo. It will be a long time before we change from them, they're incredible motors."

The latest coach features the Toyota four cylinder engine and six speed manual transmission. Air conditioning and full draw curtains add to the luxurious feel of the coach inside.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Toyota/ Caetano Optimo V
Engine Toyota 4-cylinder
Transmission Toyota six speed manual
Seats 22
Spec Full side draw curtains, air con
Supplied by Salvador Caetano 01530 263333

Mistral adds to sales team

Mistral Group (UK) plc has recruited a new employee to its sales force. Jill Blake (right) joined the company on February 5 after spending nine years in the after sales division of Cummins.

Jill will be covering the South East of the country and can be contacted on 07733 111 070. "I am very much looking forward to the change of position and to improving sales in the South East," she told *CBW*.

CBS Outdoor names new bus and retail brand manager

CBS Outdoor has appointed Laura Wilson to the new position of bus and national rail brand manager. Wilson will be responsible for promoting the company's bus and rail inventory and communicating positioning strategies for each site type.

She will also be tasked with promoting the benefits of bus and rail advertising to advertisers.

Andrew Oldham, chief operating officer at CBS Outdoor, said: "Bus and rail are absolutely core to our business. Laura's appointment as a dedicated champion of bus and rail is testimony to our commitment to growing this important advertising market."

Laura joins from Amicus Horizon, where she was brand communications manager for the past three years, and will report to marketing director Sue Todd.

CBS Outdoor is a leading advertising provider offering advertising solutions for clients looking to reach customers on the move, with a strong presence in London.

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London driver awarded

Liz Lee, a driver and operator from London General's Stockwell Garage, was presented with the Natalia Muir award by Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, for her "outstanding contribution to equality and diversity in the London Bus Industry."

Liz was nominated for her work in assisting with the introduction of two new routes in the garage and in particular for mentoring a large number of female staff joining the company. She has also been active in promoting health and safety awareness throughout the depot as part of Stockwell's Health & Safety team.

MD John Trayner said: "These awards are about recognising members of staff who go that extra mile and go above and beyond the call of duty.

"I am very pleased that we had a number of staff in the company who fitted that description and were able to join me at the event to celebrate Liz's success."

Liz recieved the award at the 2007 TfL bus, tram and dial-a-ride awards last week.

Wiltshire County Council invites expressions of interest from suitably qualified companies for the supply of three new build wheelchair accessible van converted vehicles with a maximum seating capacity of 8 passenger seats and a non-electric manual fold out passenger entry step for use on the Council's flexible transport services.

Please put your interest in writing by Friday 9th March 2007 to:- Tim Reynolds, Passenger Transport Unit, Wiltshire County Council, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JD.

Wiltshire COUNTY COUNCIL

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Deadlines
Booking: Friday 5.30pm
Full artwork: Monday 5.30pm

Contact
Sallie Bradshaw 01733 293249
sallie.bradshaw@rouncymedia.co uk

New appointment at PTUCS

John Elliot has been appointed convenor of the Public Transport Users' Committee for Scotland (PTUCS). John has worked in public transport for more than 30 years, starting his career with Scottish Bus Group subsidiary Central SMT. In the 1980s he was operations director for Kelvin Scottish and then for Strathclyde Buses, before becoming managing director of the suburban operations of First Glasgow. He is currently chief executive of Traveline Scotland and chairman of Sestran One Ticket, which provides integrated ticketing in south-east Scotland. His part-time appointment to the PTUC is for three years.

Stagecoach marketing assistant passes PCV test

Stacey Hall, marketing assistant at Stagecoach in Canterbury, has passed her PCV driving test after a four-week intensive course. Stacey joined Stagecoach in 2004 and has been helping design liveries for buses operating on new routes in Hastings and Kent. Her primary role remains in the marketing department, although she may be asked to help out with driving on special occasions.

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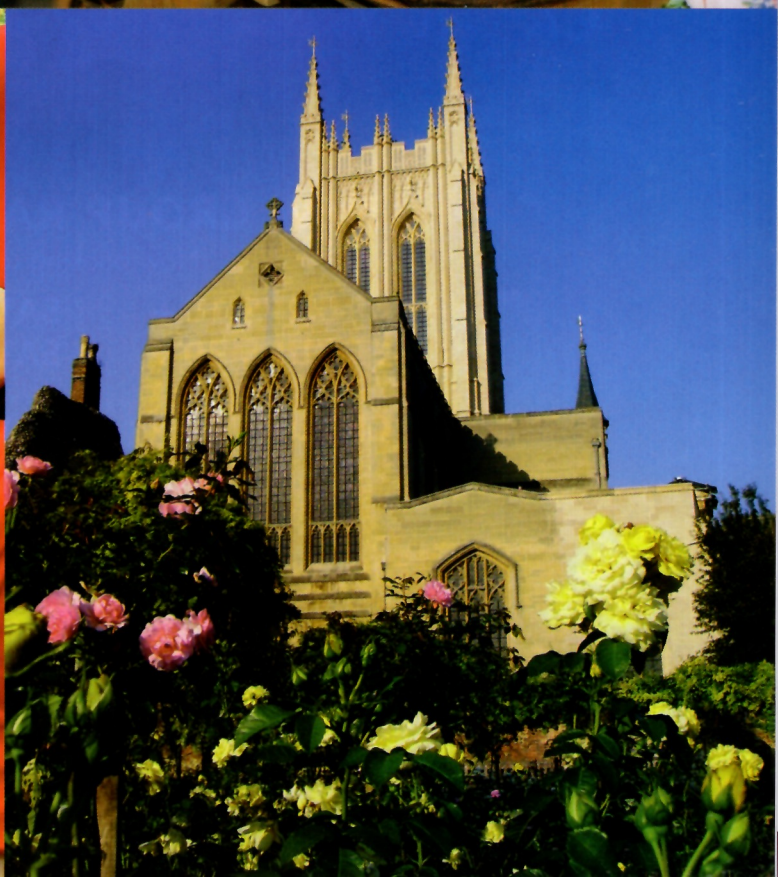

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CBW

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COACH TOURISM COUNCIL
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Make it a date

Next month's BTTF show will be the fifth tourism exhibition I've attended since starting work at *CBW* - last year's BTTF, two Excursions at London's Ally Pally and the now-departed Stoneleigh Park show being the others. One thing has struck me about all the shows I've attended - how friendly and keen all the exhibitors are.

I guess tourism is one of those sorts of industries. Many people claim to run 'people' businesses, but I think it's safe to say if you don't run a people-focused tourism company then you have a problem!

It's a bit of a cliché that everyone is busier than they've ever been, that we're all running forwards to stand still and that there aren't enough hours in the day. However, I would urge all coach tour operators to make their way to the BTTF exhibition at the NEC next month. Last year Reed Exhibitions researched the exhibitors after the event and the message came back loud and clear that the stand holders would like to see more coach operators at the show. They want to see you!

We all know that it is ever more important to refine and tailor our offerings to our customers. Consumers are getting choosier. Demands are getting more refined. Simply because a tour has given you reliable income for decades does not mean that it couldn't be refined or indeed changed to fit with the changing times we live in. A trade show such as the BTTF, which showcases hundreds of venues, hotels, attractions and events, is the ideal opportunity to take a look at the market. To go in with an open mind. Look around. Talk to people. Network.

Unless your programme is absolutely perfect - and what is? - then it is vitally important that you keep abreast of opportunities. Whether it's as basic as a change of hotel, or an additional extra excursion to a new venue close to an existing tour, or as major as a whole new opportunity, the BTTF is a superb way to check out the market, do some deals, investigate and research the market. Make it a day out for yourselves. And come and meet the *CBW* team on stand AB192.

PS. Next month's Out+About will be in three weeks time, in time for the BTTF show. Look out for more pages and a new look for the operator's favourite tourism guide.

Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

Stunning setting: Cragside House is famous for its gardens and hydro-electric power

Cragside House set to reopen

Situated a mile north of Rothbury in Northumberland is Cragside. "The revolutionary home of Lord Armstrong, Victorian inventor and landscape genius," according to the National Trust. As the name suggests, the house is built on a rocky crag above Debden Burn.

The house is full of ingenious gadgets and was the first house in the world to be lit by electricity. It was the wonder of its age, not surprisingly, and the scale of the gardens is no less incredible. The house is surrounded on all sides by one of the largest hand-made rock gardens in Europe. Beyond this is woodland housing Lord Armstrong's transatlantic conifer collection, which includes England's tallest Douglas Fir.

Across the valley, the orchard house produces fresh fruit of all varieties from nectarines and apricots to grapes and strawberries. The lakeside walks, labyrinth and adventure play area for children are yet more reasons for a visit, but despite all this, Cragside is justifiably most famous for its rhododendrons in the spring.

The house has been closed for 18 months of rewiring and opens again on Tuesday April 3. Over 100 rooms in the house originally lit by hydroelectricity have been rewired, with 30 miles of cabling installed throughout the building and 150 historic light fittings renewed. The work has been so well done by expert contractors that the National Trust is confident visitors will not notice the difference. The house is relatively easily accessible, with five coach spaces just 150 yards away. Coaches cannot proceed nearer because the drive is narrow. It is also worth noting, however, that some visitors may find the ground uneven in places and the steep paths can be slippery, so stout footwear is advised. There is a hop-on, hop-off mini bus service available between attractions in the grounds.

The self-service Stables Restaurant seats 120 people providing hot meals between 12 and 2 pm and snacks at other times.

■ General enquiries can be made by telephoning 01669 620333, or 01669 620066 for the restaurant. Further details by emailing *cragside@nationaltrust.org.uk.*

■ House opening times:
Tuesdays to Sundays and Bank Holidays:
April 3 – September 30: 1.00pm to 5.30pm
October 2 – November 4: 1.00pm to 4.30pm
Gardens and Estate will open from March 17.

OTHER NT NEWS

■ This spring from Saturday March 17, all National Trust properties will reopen for the season. We are reminded that Mothering Sunday is March 18 and the following properties will be offering special lunches and high teas: Bodium Castle, Castle Drogo, Cotehele, Fountains Abbey, Greenway, Ightham Mote, Lanhydrock, Nostell Priory, Petworth House and Park, Sissinghurst Castle garden, Trerice and Uppark. For more details visit the NT website: *www.nationaltrust.org.uk*.

■ The NT is working hard to make all attractions available for disabled visitors. Beningborough Hall in Yorkshire has installed a new lift with Heritage Lottery Funding, providing easy access to the National Portrait Gallery on the top floor. Blickling Hall in Norfolk has a "Sitooterie" in the gardens. Here disabled people receive support to play an active part in the community. Visitors can relax surrounded by artwork and listen to a sound piece.

■ Tyntesfield, near Bristol, has created a "Touch Tour" after working with a student from the Royal National Institute of the Blind Worcester New College.

Special interest tours

Back for its second year, The National Trust's annual handbook is packed with ideas to make a day out extra special. Designed specifically with the group travel organiser in mind, it will help you decide where to visit first. Take your group behind the scenes to learn the secrets and special stories of hundreds of Trust properties. Find out what is was like to be a hard-working laundry maid in the 1900s; prepare to be spooked on a ghost tour of a castle; sail in style on a yacht; or drink in the sights and smells of a Victorian garden.

With exclusive opening hours and private tours, groups can explore areas and collections not usually open to the public. To receive your free copy of this Special Interest Tours booklet (available from March) contact the travel trade office on 01793 817574 or email: *traveltrade@nationaltrust.org.uk*.

Manchester waterfront: ideal destination for group visits

DEALS OF THE WEEK

■ The Quays, Manchester's waterfront area, has plenty of options for group visits. Group day passes, free coach parking and driver refreshment can all be arranged for trips to the Lowry. Described as an architectural flagship with a unique identity, there is plenty for a group to see and do. Discount theatre tickets, tours of the building and catering can all be arranged and a dedicated group booking team will deal with any inquiries on 0161 8762003.

■ Kew Bridge Steam Museum in west London can cater for group visits seven days a week throughout the year, including evening visits on Wednesdays. A choice of self-guided tours, weekend special events and a special weekday 'steam up' of the engines can all be arranged. Admission prices are less 10% for groups between 10 and 39 and 15% for 40 people. A booking deposit of £20 is required. Call 0208 568 4757 for information.

■ The Ambassador Theatre Group is offering discounts on tickets to most of its 25 shows currently showing. Groups of 12 or more can take advantage of the best seat offer. For £25 per person, they are guaranteed the best available seats for weekday and Saturday matinee performances. School groups tickets cost £17.50 weekdays and for seniors, tickets are £20 for Monday evening and Wednesday matinee shows.

Bury St Edmunds Abbey Gardens

HOLIDAY POUND

£1 will get you:

Euro	**1.44**
Switzerland *(Franc)*	**2.33**
Norway *(Kroner)*	**11.60**
Hungary *(Forint)*	**355.98**
Czech Republic *(Koruna)*	**39.94**
Poland *(Zloty)*	**5.44**

DIESEL PRICES

Cost per litre in pence:

Great Britain	**92.10**
Norway	**87.55**
Italy	**78.89**
Sweden	**76.06**
Germany	**72.88**
Switzerland	**71.28**
Ireland	**70.69**
Belgium	**70.28**
Czech Republic	**69.81**
France	**69.05**
Portugal	**68.85**
Hungary	**68.21**
Netherlands	**68.10**
Austria	**66.59**
Spain	**66.25**
Poland	**63.87**
Luxembourg	**57.85**

Suffolk celebrates US links

Throughout May, Suffolk will be celebrating its links with the first permanent English settlement in the USA 400 years ago by Captain Bartholomew Gosnold. The adventurer led two maritime expeditions from England to the New World - the first in 1602 and the second in 1606/7 when he was one of the prime movers in the founding of the Jamestown colony, Virginia, some 13 years before the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in the Mayflower. Both voyages are thought to have been planned around the open fire in the Great Hall at Otley Hall, near Ipswich, which was then the home of the Gosnold family. The Hall is open to the public on 6 and 27 May and 26 August, 2-6pm.

America 400

Sunday May 6

On Sunday May 6, 'American 400' will celebrate Suffolk's US connections with a family fun day in Bury St Edmunds Abbey Gardens. A variety of entertainment will be on offer plus stalls, a veteran car display, military parade and funfair; visitors will also be able to learn more about the county's famous ancestors. At 3.30pm a special service in St Edmundsbury Cathedral will feature the premiere of a piece of music specially commissioned for the Cathedral Choir to mark the occasion.

Throughout the month 'American connections' Blue Badge Guide tours of Bury St Edmunds will also be available for groups pre-booked through the Tourist Information Centre on 01284 764667 and the Bury Record Office will display artefacts linked to the Gosnold family and other early explorers to the New World. On America 400 day these will be displayed in a marquee in Abbey Gardens.

A booklet, *On the Gosnold Trail*, highlights these and other Suffolk locations linked to Captain Gosnold open to the public; free copies are available from Tourist Information centres around Suffolk or telephone Ipswich TIC on 01473 258070.

■ For a free copy of the *Choose Suffolk* short breaks brochure which provides an overview of the county call 08700 770881 or visit *www.choosesuffolk.com.*

Etap launches new hotels

Etap, described as a new breed of hotel positioned between budget hotels and bed and breakfasts, has opened in Birmingham, Sheffield and Cardiff. All Etap venues will be full service hotels, appealing to today's "smart traveller who wants a no-frills, good service".

At each Etap hotel, they guarantee 24-hour reception, WiFi access, 24/7 food with snacks such as soups, salads and sandwiches, all-you-can-eat breakfasts from as little as £2.95 and on-site parking.

Room rates start from £32 per room, per night. All rooms are en suite, can accommodate three guests and have TVs and radios.

To ask about rates and availability call 0121 622 7575 for Etap Birmingham, 029 20458131 for Cardiff and 0114 2434109 for Sheffield. More details are also on *www.etaphotel.com.*

Briefly

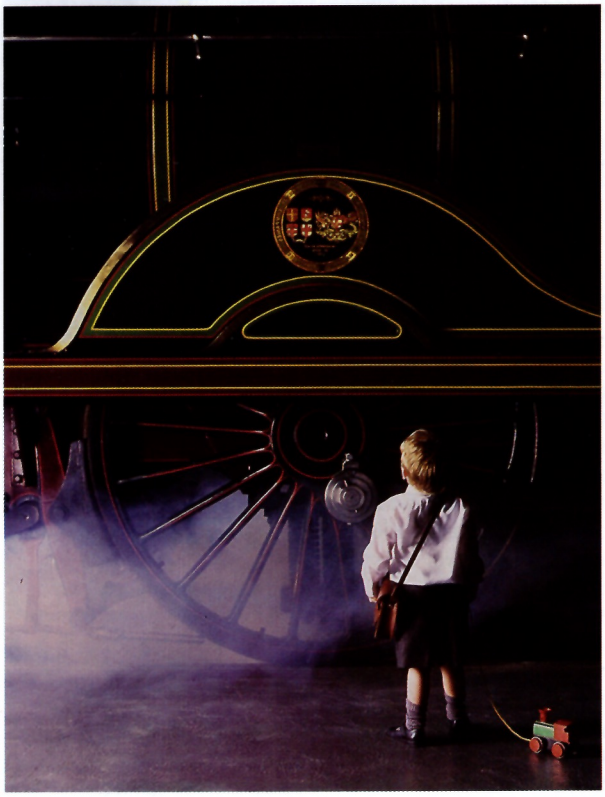
■ **Veteran pop star Lulu has been confirmed as the special guest vocalist when Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra make a welcome return to the National Arboretum, Westonbirt, this summer. The performance will be on Friday July 20. Tickets are on sale now priced at £30. Call 01842 814612 for enquiries.**

■ **Visit London predicts the capital will see a demise of low-quality accommodation. The board's latest hotel development monitor shows almost a 50% rise in the branded hotel sector, with B&Bs now only accounting for 28% of the market, compared to 47% in 2002. Hilton, Thistle and Premier Travel Inn are still London's top three brands, according to the monitor.**

■ **My Travel and Thomas Cook have agreed a merger that will spark further European tour operator consolidation. The deal will combine Thomas Cook AG's 33 operating brands, 2,400 travel agencies, 66 aircraft and 20,000 staff with MyTravel's 17 brands, 31 aircraft and 13,000 staff worldwide.**

■ **A new hotel has received the go-ahead to be built in the Lake District, despite policy stating no new developments should ever be built there. The hotel will also have a leisure site, including a pool, four holiday apartments and five houses. It will be built at the Croft in Hawkshead.**

■ **The number of visitors coming to the UK equated to an arrival for every second of every day last year, according to latest figures from the Office for National Statistics. Total overseas visitors were recorded as 32m in 2006, a 7% rise on 2005 figures. VisitBritain said that although promising, the figures suggest they still need to persuade people to stay for longer and to spend more.**



NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

The wonders of railway heritage fascinate all age groups

Full steam ahead at York Railway Museum

The World's largest railway museum is open every day apart from Christmas, from 10am to 6pm. Situated just over 500 metres from York railway station and signposted from the city's ring road, the museum is ideally located with disabled access and plenty of coach parking. Entry to the museum is free, but there may be charges for special events.

WHAT'S ON

■ **February 10 – 25** A day out with Thomas. Go along and join the famous blue Thomas Engine and Friends

■ **March 17- 18** Cab-it. This year the museum has combined a theme of steam with diesel traction. A number of cabs will be open and there will be visiting diesel locomotives.

■ There will be many other events throughout the year such as diesel loco displays, diesel rides, 'Diesel Driver for a Fiver', talks and demonstrations, rail safety, model railway exhibitions, film shows, theatre from Platform 4 Theatre Group and much more.

The 'explainer' team at the museum gives daily talks and at 12.40pm every day there is a guided tour, which could take you anywhere in the museum.

The big new attraction at the museum is the Norwich Union Yorkshire Wheel - the first of its kind in Yorkshire. It has 42 enclosed, air conditioned pods accommodating up to eight people (a maximum of six adults and two children) and there is also a luxury VIP pod with leather interior and the promise of something extra for a special occasion. The ride lasts 13 minutes with three rotations. The wheel will provide wonderful views across York and the surrounding countryside. It is open every day from 10am to 6pm with the last ticket sale at 5.15pm. Adults pay £6 and children over four £4. A private pod is £44 while the VIP pod costs £65. Groups need to book in advance to get a timed entry. If groups of 20 or more book 48 hours ahead then coach parking is free. Call 01904 686263 for group bookings.

The Elgar Birthplace Museum

In June this year it will be 150 years since Sir Edward Elgar was born in Worcestershire. Certainly one of our greatest composers, he stands alongside many of the greats such as Mozart and Beethoven. His best-known works include Land of Hope and Glory and Nimrod.

The museum, which is three miles west of the cathedral city of Worcester, is open every day from 11am to 5pm excluding the Christmas and New Year period, was started after his death in 1934, by Elgar's daughter, Carice, following his wishes.

The museum was expanded in 2000, providing more display space and better facilities. Visitors can follow Elgar's life story, his struggles and ultimate rise to fame. There is also an opportunity to see aspects of Victorian and Edwardian society through family letters, photographs, cards and personal possessions. Elgar, as well as being a great musician, also enjoyed many other hobbies such as golf, cycling, scientific experiments, puzzles, etc, and he also travelled widely in Europe and the United States. There is usually a busy events programme and for details of this, visit *www.elgarmuseum.org*.

Groups of ten and over are welcome but must be booked in advance and special evening arrangements can be made for groups of more than 25.

Hot drinks are available and the Plough Inn next door is recommended for more substantial refreshments. There is coach parking available on site. Call 01905 333677 to book.

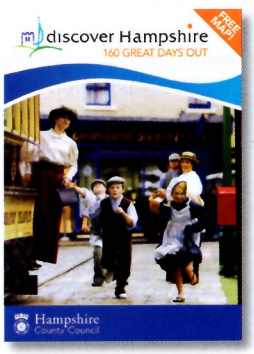
Elgar Birthplace Museum: Delightful setting in the Worcestershire countryside

Great days out in Hampshire

From an evening's entertainment at an arts centre to a day of outdoor fun at a country park... Hampshire's new visitor guide has it covered.

***Discover Hampshire* is a one-stop directory produced by Hampshire County Council for anyone wanting to find out more about the many places to visit and things to do in the county. It features an impressive 160 great days out and caters for a wide range of needs.**

The guide is arranged in categories including military and maritime heritage; houses and gardens; family fun and arts, crafts and entertainment and countryside. There's a handy food and drink



section with details of major food events and also an 'at a glance' list of events for 2007, detailing shows, festivals, exhibitions and fairs being held in the county.

To add to the enjoyment, *Discover Hampshire* also features a page of discount vouchers offering reduced entry to some of the these attractions including a two-for-one voucher to Milestones, Hampshire's living history museum in Basingstoke.

The county council's executive member for recreation and heritage, Margaret Snaith, said: "There is so much to see and do in Hampshire and this guide is ideal for anyone wishing to get out and about in the county in 2007. These guides are a great way of informing visitors and residents about the fascinating cultural and recreational opportunities which exist in Hampshire."

■ **To order a copy email *hampshire@responseuk.co.uk* or call 0800 0938930.**

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Briefly

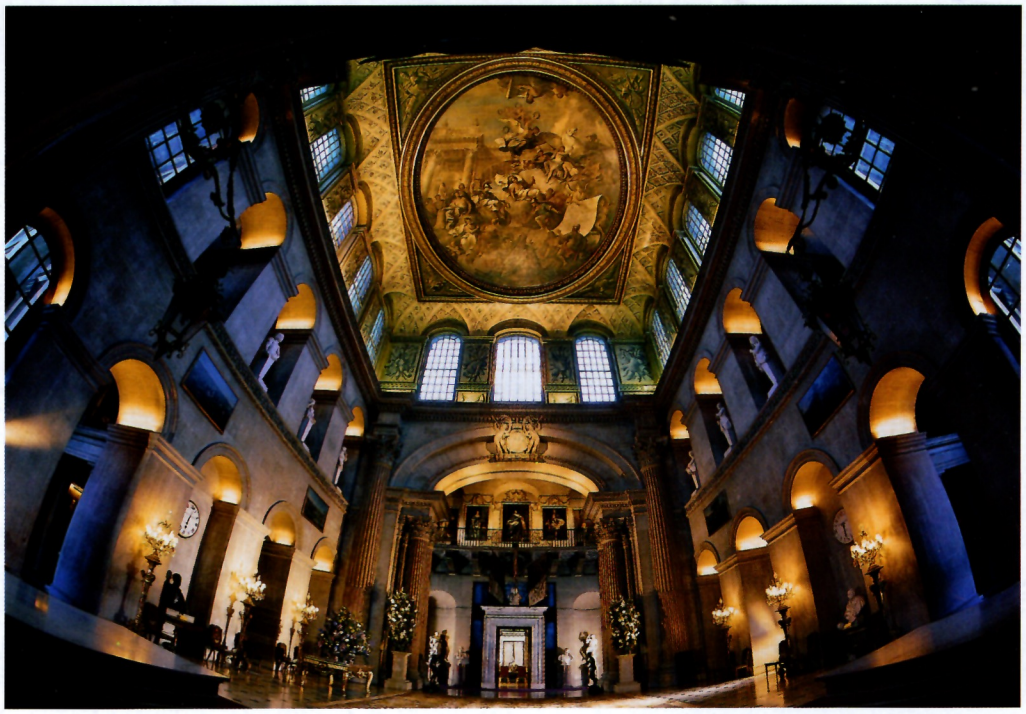
Thomson has called on the Office of Fair Trading to take immediate action against travel companies displaying misleading prices. Thomson sales director, Derek Jones, said: "We want enforcement action to be taken against all non-complying suppliers. Thomson introduced an honest pricing campaign to try and steer the travel industry away from rip-off Britain."

Oasis and the Beatles are two of the biggest features on a new VisitBritain initiative, dubbed the rock map. The project is aimed at increasing areas of musical significance and in boosting internal tourism. Laurence Bresh, general manager for VisitBritain, said: "We know there is huge interest in locations connected to popular culture. Everybody knows about tourists going to Liverpool to visit the Beatles locations, but it's much wider than that."

A luxury hotel will form part of redevelopment plans for London's heliport in Battersea. Helicopter charter company PremiAir has been awarded the exclusive contract to operate the heliport in a contract awarded by von Essen Hotels. The 70-room boutique hotel will house the new terminal, reception and business meeting rooms.

Half of the UK's small and medium enterprises (SME) market has lost faith in the corporate travel industry. The UK Companies BT Report suggests British firms do not believe their agents are independent and that they steer them towards their chosen suppliers rather than finding the best deal.

Thomson claims two million customers viewed its online destination videos last month. The operator is attracting a million people to its site a week, with top searches being for the Canary Islands' Tenerife and Gran Canaria and Majorca.



Blenheim Palace: Historic Oxfordshire venue boasts a busy programme for group tours this year

A packed programme at Blenheim

2007 promises to be a busy year at Oxfordshire's magnificent Blenheim Palace. Home to the Duke of Marlborough and the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, the palace and gardens offers a memorable day out. Set in 2,100 acres of parkland, the palace is surrounded by sweeping lawns, formal gardens and a magnificent lake. Here's what's going on at Blenheim this season:

February 10 Blenheim Palace opens

February 10-18 Blenheim Palace and World War II Half-term entertainment. Discover what life was like at Blenheim Palace during the Second World War. Join one of the family tours and learn about the Malvern College boys evacuated here in 1939, and how Blenheim was once used as MI5 headquarters.

March 31 – April 15 Easter entertainment in the Pleasure Gardens Take a ride on the miniature train to the Pleasure Gardens for Easter family fun and entertainment.

April 6-9 Blenheim Palace Easter Egg Challenge (Easter Weekend) The fourth annual Easter egg trail at Blenheim Palace has a bug theme this year. Follow the trail around the beautiful Pleasure Gardens.

May 5-7 Blenheim Palace Jousting Tournament featuring the Knights of Royal England and falconry displays (May Bank Holiday) Gallant knights and their mighty steeds meet on the South Lawn to battle for glory in a spectacular jousting tournament. The tournament will recreate the great contest that took place at Earl's Court in 1912, originally organised by Jennie Churchill, mother of Sir Winston.

May 11-13 Home Design & Interiors exhibition

May 26-28 Living Heritage Oxfordshire Craft Fair (Whitsun Holiday) A country craft show held at Blenheim Palace including some of the finest craftsmen, artists and designers in the country.

June 2-3 Blenheim Triathlon Admission included for spectators. Please note that activity takes place within the Great Court and therefore admission procedures could be affected.

July 13-15 Breathe at Blenheim A new consumer health and lifestyle show covering a range of topical issues in health, fitness and beauty. From a Healthy Eating Zone with top chefs cooking up great healthy dishes, a Beauty Centre with a live makeover stage, to the Fitness Factory with demonstrations of latest classes and ways to tone and keep fit. Separate admission prices charged for the show.

July 22 Fly to the Past A festival of the history of flight. Separate admission prices apply.

July 28 Battle Proms evening picnic concert Separate admission prices charged.

From July 28 Summer holiday entertainment in the Pleasure Gardens

August 10-12 Blenheim Palace Jousting Tournament featuring the Knights of Royal England and falconry displays Knights and steeds return to the South Lawn for a re-run of the May spectacular.

August 25-27 Living Heritage Oxfordshire Craft Fair (August Bank Holiday) The country craft show returns to Blenheim.

September 6-9 Blenheim International Horse Trials Palace, Park and Gardens open as usual. Separate admission for the Horse Trials.

September 23 Classic Car and Motorcycle Show

October 20-28 Halloween Horrors Half-term costumed entertainment in the Great Court. Hear tales of horror and Halloween at Blenheim Palace

November 10-December 9 Christmas at Blenheim Palace

November 16-18 Living Crafts for Christmas Advance tickets available.

December 8-9 Special entertainment in the Palace and Courtyards

December 9 Blenheim Palace and Gardens close for the winter. All details *www.blenheimpalace.com*

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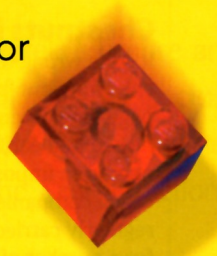

LEGOLAND Windsor is open from 17th March to 3rd November 2007.

We are closed on the following dates: 24th & 25th April / 1st, 2nd, 8th, 9th, 15th, 16th, 22nd & 23rd May / 11th, 12th, 18th, 19th, 25th & 26th September / 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th, 16th, 17th, 29th, 30th & 31st October / 1st & 2nd November 2007.

These rates are confidential to your company and must be packaged at all times.

† £2 supplement per ticket on fireworks dates, 20th, 21st, 26th - 28th October & 3rd November 2007.

* Gate prices correct at time of going to press and are subject to change.

All information in this leaflet is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change.

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LOOK OUT FOR OUR SPECIAL EVENTS DATES FOR 2007

Has Blackpool had its chips?

Manchester gets Britain's super-casino, but it would have been so much better for all concerned if it had been awarded to Blackpool, argues Stephen Rodgers

So Manchester it is then. Britain's first super-casino will be located, not inside the Dome, next to the Blackpool Tower, nor even in buzzing Milton Keynes... but in a suburb east of Manchester and next to a football stadium affectionately known as "Wastelands" (but not by City fans, of course). Manchester's bid apparently ticked all the right boxes for employment and regeneration criteria but in not awarding the project to Blackpool I can't help thinking that a vital tourism development opportunity has been lost.

The Tourist Area Life Cycle is one of the basic fundamentals learned by tourism students in higher education these days. Basically it dictates that all holiday destinations experience a sequence of phases from discovery through development to stagnation and ultimately decline, thus needing to "re-invent" themselves. Like many traditional British seaside resorts, Blackpool is very much in the "decline" part of that cycle and the casino would certainly have provided a unique opportunity for re-birth. Of all the candidates, I also felt Blackpool was the best suited to host such a project.

Ministers insist that Las Vegas is not coming to Britain, but if it was, Blackpool is probably where you would put it.

Will the super casino boost tourism by coach? Of course it will and Manchester has already proved it is more than capable of attracting tourists by coach. But it would have been so much easier to sell short breaks to Blackpool where the range of additional attractions on the doorstep would both have benefited from the spin-offs and made packages more attractive to potential clients.

Manchester is "Super C" but there is also a clutch of "medium" and "mini" casinos about to be launched in locations as varied as Bath and Solihull. All are potential catalysts to fill coaches whether on day trips or weekends and, no, you shouldn't be concerned about encouraging gambling if you advertise such tours. I can think of at least one very big coach operator today which started life solely by running bingo outings. Mind you, I can think of another operator who achieved considerable success running tours with guaranteed no drinking, smoking, gambling nor other vices - his name was Thomas Cook and he hasn't done too badly either!

Stephen Rodgers

Chestnuts in spring?

It's the wrong time of year for chestnuts but from last week's Letters page, one perennial seems to have blossomed earlier than normal- tour operators imposing low hire rates on coach companies. This publication has regularly carried stories on the subject for a number of years - and therein lies the crux. Not being born with diesel in my blood, I have always found it hard to understand why it is always the tour operator that is cast as the villain in such situations for daring to ask for vehicles at £260 a day.

Grand UK are one of a number of successful tour operators in recent years that have managed to obtain transport and accommodation at knock-down prices and then use proficient marketing expertise to sell packages at a profit. They are not alone. Leger, Majestic, David Urquhart, National Holidays, Coachholiday.com, Newmarket - they have all done the same sort of thing and done it very well. As well as making money, those companies have also been at the forefront of product innovation, particularly in off season. They are probably responsible for most of the themed breaks that we have all copied and sold successfully ourselves.

> IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH EASIER TO SELL SHORT BREAKS TO BLACKPOOL

From my position on the sidelines of coach operation, £260 a day doesn't sound enough to run a high specification vehicle, either. If it was £100 more, what effect would it have on the price of those special Turkey & Tinsel or Roaring 40s breaks that the likes of Grand UK sell so well? £10 or £15 maybe? I can't really see the market drying up as a result.

There is probably much more to the story than has been reported so far, but one thing hasn't changed. If tour operators are paying such low rates to hire vehicles, some of your colleagues out there are working for them. And as I said at the beginning, this is an old chestnut. If the situation isn't sustainable, at what point do those involved become aware of it?

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Cross-sea update

Dave smith with his monthly round-up of what's new at the ferry companies and ports

Dover looks to the future

Dover Harbour Board has unveiled more details about their Terminal 2 development, which will feature four new ferry berths, a waterfront development of bars, restaurants and hotels, a flyover system to manage traffic from the A20 and a possible residential development.

Costing around £300 million, Terminal 2 will be developed on and around the existing Western Docks. Dover Harbour Board says its plans for a ferry terminal would not only meet increasing traffic demands but also kick-start regeneration of the town.

Around 2,600 jobs could be created and the new terminal will be financed by current income from the Eastern Docks. The board says it already has a sizeable cash sum saved in the bank. The new jobs will be created by the development, both in terms of landside operations and sea-based positions.

It is anticipated that Terminal 2 could be operational by the end of 2012/beginning of 2013. In 2006, 2.7 million cars and coaches, and 13.7 million passengers passed through the port. By 2014, the port forecasts that it will handling 2.75 million and 14.6 million, respectively.

Stena retains Best Ferry Award

Stena Line has retained the Best Ferry Company Award at the prestigious Irish Travel Trade Awards for an eighth time and the second year in a row.

Rory Creagh, Stena Line's business development manager, was presented with the award on Stena Line's behalf by Pat Gallagher TD, Minister for State at the Department of Transport, at a ceremony in Dublin attended by more than 600 guests and VIPs from the travel industry in Ireland.

Paul Grant, head of travel market – Irish Sea, said: "Stena Line is committed to providing customers with the best craft and the best service and we continue to invest in all aspects of our business to ensure that we offer a first class service to all our customers."

Above: Coach and tour operators on the recent Norfolk Line/Holiday Ireland Hotels familiarisation visit. Below: Coaches now welcome aboard

Norfolk Line welcomes coaches on Irish Sea crossings

Danish-owned ferry giant Norfolk Line is now carrying coaches on its Irish Sea crossings.

Having taken over the routes from Liverpool (Birkenhead) to Dublin and Belfast, formerly operated by Norsemerchant Ferries, Norfolk Line has recognised the importance of the coach market and is now offering competitive packages in conjunction with Holiday Ireland Hotels. The ferries sail daily at 22.00 and 22.30 respectively, with coach parties being given the opportunity to board at 20.00 or 20.30 to enjoy a leisurely evening meal. And, uniquely, despite the vessels arriving in Ireland at 05.00, coach parties do not have to disembark until 07.00 or 07.30.

The vessels operating on the service offer a range of onboard services including restaurants, lounge bars, shops, cinemas and a range of en-suite cabins.

To launch its new service for operators, Norfolk Line and Holiday Ireland Hotels recently hosted a familiarisation visit to Ireland for UK coach and tour operators.

Over 40 guests enjoyed overnight crossings with meals onboard and two nights in Ireland fully hosted by Holiday Ireland Hotels.

Reservations and further information on Norfolk Line inclusive packages can be obtained from David Roberts of Holiday Ireland Hotels on 01772 601035, or email him at : *david-roberts@dsl.pipex.com.*

Scots services to stay with CalMac?

CalMac begins tendering process

CalMac Ferries, operator of the Clyde and Hebridean lifeline ferry services, is embarking on a fortnight-long period of meetings with stakeholders in preparation for its bid to continue to operate these services.

CalMac Ferries' managing director, Lawrie Sinclair, said: "We are moving into a new era in terms of operating the west coast ferry services, and it is important that everyone is fully informed about the nature of the contracts which will be in place, and the obligations they place on the operator."

Final bids for the tendering exercise are due to be delivered to the Scottish Executive on May 11. Mr Sinclair added: "We firmly believe that CalMac Ferries is well placed to win this bid and we are confident that we can launch a robust and innovative bid for the services."

Although 17 companies initially showed interest in the tender, it now looks as if Caledonian MacBrayne will be the sole bidder.

Isle of Man-based V Ships was the latest company to pull out of the tendering process, stating that the tender details were too restrictive to allow them to provide more efficient services on the routes.

The tendering process is required under EU rules, as the services are subsidised.

New service announced for Newhaven to Le Havre

LD Lines has announced that it will be running a new ferry service from Newhaven to Le Havre, with the first sailing scheduled for May 1. There will be daily departures from Newhaven at 12.30 and from Le Havre at 20.00, and the service will operate until September 30. The sailing duration is expected to be five hours.

LD Lines was the successful bidder for the Transmanche Ferries service between Newhaven and Dieppe and it will now be operating two routes from Newhaven in addition to its service from Portsmouth to Le Havre.

Further information on LD Lines services can be obtained by visiting its website *www.ldlines.co.uk*.

Dave Smith is one of the best-known faces in coach tourism, having worked at Townsend Thoresen, Olau Line, Sealink, as general manager of Westbus, at Hoverspeed and Port of Dover. In at the start of the Coach Tourism Council, he latterly worked as its administrator

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British Travel Trade Fair Show Preview

Next month's BTTF show at Birmingham's NEC is a 'must visit' for all coach tour operators. CBW's Rupert King takes a look at who's there and what's going on

At the request of last years exhibitors, the 2007 British Travel Trade Fair has been made more appealing to coach operators with a coaching seminar, a new coach-friendly exhibitor award and free coach transfers to and from the show.

The show is the centrepiece of British Tourism Week which runs from March 12 to 18 to promote Britain's £75bn tourism industry. Fiona Jeffery, managing director of the BTTF, said: "Many of those attending the BTTF, myself included, have devoted most of our working lives to the travel and tourism industry. The nation as a whole benefits enormously from our efforts - tourism and the economic activity it generates, doesn't just happen. Devoted entirely to UK and Ireland tourism, in just two days, BTTF generates millions of pounds-worth of business."

The show will be staged at Birmingham's NEC on March 13 and 14 and is expected to attract more than 3,500 participants. Already, 300 exhibitors have signed up, with many more expected in the remaining two weeks. Event owner VisitBritain has urged exhibitors to showcase the best of the best. With the current strength of the pound, the UK is seen as an expensive destination, as event manager AnnMarie Meaney explains: "As a tourism nation we have to face the fact that we cannot compete on price alone. The emphasis has to be on value and that means promoting the sheer unrivalled quality of our tourism product. By definition, buyers come to BTTF because they already believe that Britain can do the business for them. Our mission is not only to reinforce that conviction, but to impress upon them that ours is a great value proposition."

British Travel Trade Fair
13-14 March 2007
NEC, Birmingham

All the biggest players in the travel and tourism industry will be represented including P&O Ferries, the Hilton and Best Western Hotel groups, attractions including Alnwick Castle and Blenheim Palace, and representing the coach industry, the CTC. Coach and Bus Week will also be there, so take a minute to come over to stand AB192 to meet the team.

Overseas visitor numbers boost BTTF's 'must attend' message

Organisers of British Travel Trade Fair have welcomed latest government statistics showing a big increase in overseas visitors to the UK, saying it reinforces BTTF's importance as a "must-attend" event.

According to national statistics, overseas visitors made 9.7 million visits to the UK in the three months to the end of September 2006, up 10% against the same period in 2005. Overseas visitor spending was up 9%, to £4.9 billion.

"Despite the challenges presented by terrorism and security alerts in the UK and around the world, Britain is maintaining its place as the sixth most visited destination in the world," says Tom Wright, chief executive of VisitBritain, which owns BTTF.

"The really significant figure is that in the nine months to September 30 this year, international visitor numbers were 7% higher, at 24.5 million, than in the same period a year earlier. The underlying trend appears to be one of sustained growth."

In the 12-month period, the number of western European visitors to the UK was 7% higher (15.5 million), visitor numbers from North America were 7% higher (3.6 million), and those from the rest of the world were 8% higher, at 5.4 million.

BTTF backs school trips

London's school teachers are being urged to attend the BTTF to help them meet new government standards on learning outside the classroom. It is the first time school staff have officially been invited to the show where admission is normally restricted to travel and tourism professionals.

"The government's new initiative, announced recently by education and skills secretary Alan Johnson, is encouraging teachers and children to get out more," says Ann Marie Meaney, BTTF event manager.

"BTTF is a unique opportunity for schools to evaluate the educational opportunities offered by hundreds of attractions, historic houses and castles, theatres and museums, from all over the country - all in one place."

More than seven million schoolchildren take part each year in learning outside the classroom activities such as visits to museums, city farms, parks, and places of worship. Schools are now being encouraged to report such learning activities to Ofsted.

COMPLIMENTARY COACH TIMETABLE

Tuesday March 13:

Service	Outbound dep/arr	Return dep/arr
London – NEC *(direct)*	**8.30am/11.30am**	**3.30pm/6pm**
Stretton – NEC *(direct)*	**9am/11.30am**	**3.30pm/6.15pm**
Sheffield – NEC *(via Nottingham)*	**9am/11.30am**	**3.30pm/6.15pm**
Nottingham – NEC *(direct)*	**10am/11.30am**	**3.30pm/5.15pm**
Cardiff – NEC *(via Bristol/Gloucester)*	**8.45am/11.15am**	**3.30pm/6.15pm**
Bristol – NEC *(via Gloucester)*	**9.30am/11.15am**	**3.30pm/5.15pm**
Gloucester – NEC *(direct)*	**10am/11.15am**	**3.30pm/4.45pm**
Leicester – NEC *(direct)*	**10am/11am**	**3.30pm/4.30pm**
Derby – NEC	**10am/11am**	**3.30pm/4.30pm**

Coach booking line 0845 2267542.

WHEN AND WHERE

British Travel Trade Fair 2007 takes place at the Birmingham National Exhibition Centre on March 13-14 in Hall 12

OPENING TIMES

Tuesday March 13: **10am – 5pm**
Wednesday March 14: **10am – 5pm**

"A number of organisations like the National Trust, the Eden Project and the YHA - all of whom take part in BTTF - have already thrown their weight behind this new initiative," said Meaney.

"Other exhibitors include organisations such as English Heritage, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Academy of Arts, St Paul's Cathedral, and even the Houses of Parliament. The educational opportunities are endless."

Complimentary transfers

Five top coach companies have teamed up to offer complimentary return trips for all GTOS, coach tour operators and travel agents to the BTTF. Anderson Travel is operating free trips between London and the NEC, WA Shearings is offering direct trips from Cheshire and Macpherson Coaches is running from both Leicester and Derby. Bakers Coaches is operating between Sheffield and the NEC via Nottingham, while Edwards Coaches is laying on services between Cardiff and the NEC via Bristol and Gloucester.

12–18 MARCH 2007 british tourism week™

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Launching in 2007 and with HRH Prince Charles as Patron, **British Tourism Week** is a series of inter-related industry events, which will raise national and international awareness of the size, value and importance of Britain's £74 billion visitor economy.

british tourism week will demonstrate that tourism is critical to the economy of the United Kingdom by:

- Increasing industry awareness
- Raising quality standards
- Promoting training and professionalism
- Improving the UK's competitiveness
- Supporting the preparations for hosting the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

British Tourism Week will be an annual event and is organised by VisitBritain, UKinbound and Reed Travel Exhibitions, with the support of the Tourism Alliance, the Tourism Society and the regional and national tourist boards.

britishtourismweek.com

visitBritain UKinbound Reed Travel Exhibitions

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Tuesday March 13

10.30 – 10.45
BTTF opening ceremony, Stage
Tessa Jowell, secretary of state for culture, media and sport, officially opens BTTF 2007.

11.30 – 12.30
Opening press briefing, Stage
The national tourist boards, together with VisitBritain, provide an overview of tourism activity within their respective regions.

13.00 – 13.55
Tourism Society question time, Stage
Bernard Donoghue, MTS, head of public affairs at VisitBritain, chairs a panel of high-profile industry experts ready to address the burning issues affecting the UK industry.

14.15 – 14.45
Practical promotional methods on a shoestring budget, Stage
Susan Briggs, the Tourism Network, will give a practical taster outlining how to avoid spending any money or doing too much work by using shoestring marketing methods.

15.00 – 15.45
Getting the Britain Brand in shape for 2012
The 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games offer Britain a unique opportunity to showcase the destination to the international market.

16.00 – 16.45
The changing face of coaching
Three key industry representatives share their views on the issues affecting coach operators and discuss ideas on how to adapt to new challenges. Three areas of discussion will be: **Legislation:** drivers' hours, emissions, new EU regulations discussed by Steven Salmon from the CPT. **Threat of lowcost:** Karen Gee from WA Shearings on how to confront the lowcost travel market. **How to market your business:** Sean Taggart from Albatross Travel talking about the recent launch of *door2tour.com*. Each speaker will be giving a short presentation on their area of expertise, followed by a ten-minute Q&A from the audience.

19.00 – LATE
BTTF big knight our (invitation only) Warwick Castle
Courtesy of BTTF and VisitBritain, together with Spamalot, Heart of England Tourism and the Tussauds Group, this unique evening will be taking place in the grounds of Warwick Castle.

British Travel Trade Fair floor plan

Wednesday March 14

11.00 – 11.45
Quality and innovation, Stage
How customers' needs are shaping VisitBritain's approach to quality assurance and tourist information provision.

13.00 – 16.00
UKinbound workshop (invitation only) UKinbound feature area
Scheduled appointment for VisitBritain hosted buyers.

13.00 – 13.45
VisitBritain: commercial and retail opportunities, UKinbound feature area
VisitBritain invites you to find out more about their commercial platforms and the opportunities available to partners, including worldwide online and offline retail distribution.

14.00 – 14.45
VisitBritain: sustainable tourism, Stage
The global climate change debate and the growth of ethical consumerism have made sustainable tourism a key issue for the industry.

16.00 – 16.45
BTTF exhibitor excellence awards (exhibitors only), Stage
Winners of the BTTF excellence awards are announced, highlighting and recognising the efforts of exhibitors.

17.00
BTTF closes

CONTACTS

Visitor & exhibitor enquiries
Tel 0172 7738860

Management
Tel 020 89107725; Fax 020 88340636

Operations
Tel 020 84398881; Fax 020 88340589

Post
Reed Travel Exhibitions, Gateway House, 28 The Quadrant, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1DN

Website
www.britishtraveltradefair.com

GETTING THERE

BY ROAD
The Birmingham National Exhibition Centre is signposted from the M42. Leave at junction 6 and follow the signs to the relevant car park for the BTTF. Car parking costs £7 per day.

BY RAIL
The NEC is served by the adjacent Birmingham International railway station, which has direct trains from London Euston along with regular services from Birmingham New Street, which forms a major interchange for cross-country and Glasgow-London trains. Visit *www.nationalrail.co.uk* for train times and a journey planner.

BY AIR
Birmingham International Airport is also adjacent to the NEC and there are many direct flights to and from European cities including Brussels, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Paris. A five-minute taxi-ride will take you straight to the NEC from the airport. Visit *www.bhx.co.uk* for more information.

COACH TOURISM COUNCIL
Promoting Travel and Tourism by Coach

CTC 2007/8 Handbook on sale now

The newly-designed Coach Tourism Council Member Handbook 2007/8 was published this week. It has a new, colourful format and editorial which will further help the CTC promote travel and tourism by coach to a wider audience, especially the consumer media.

Someone who does not need convincing is David Gordois, consultant travel editor to the *News of the World*, who tells readers why coaches are his perfect "window on the world", while a profile on award-winning Maynes Coaches of Buckie in Scotland shows how a typical CTC member has grown with the times to meet ever-changing demands.

The sheer size, importance and diversity of the coach industry is underlined and there are also sections on reasons to join the CTC and member benefits. Last but not least there is a listing of all CTC members. For non-members the handbook is available for £50. For a copy, contact *admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk*

"With our much-improved website, on-going promotional press trips and the handbook, the CTC is continuing to make great strides in raising the profile of coach tourism," said CTC chairman, Sean Taggart. "The website is now attracting up to 1,000 visitors a day and press stories have been read by millions of people."

Caption

Above: CTC members Joy Perrett and Sharon Price of Hilton Hotels with Dave Parry at the annual Hilton Travel Trade Dinner held recently at the elegant Hilton Hotel Paddington. Left: Sean Taggart and Chris Roberts playing pool at last week's Conference games night.

Events and fam trips

Make a note in your diary for the CTC AGM, which will be held at the Ricoh Stadium in Coventry on May 17. It will form part of the Coaching Day Out event and is an ideal opportunity for all members to meet the board and hear about current initiatives.

The board is also planning to hold an additional major event during 2007 and hopes to announce details during March. In the meantime, John White of Ellen Smith Tours has kindly agreed to take over the mantle of running CTC fam trips and is currently drawing up plans for trips in 2007 with the aim of holding the first event at the end of April. It will be a combination of a fam trip and a get-together with the board at a regional venue. Destinations being considered include Belvoir Castle, Jersey, the west of Ireland and a summer in London promotion.

Riverboat packages

CTC member City Cruises plc has teamed up with Madame Tussauds and the Cabinet War Rooms and put together some great new trade packages, exclusively for groups and tour operators, for launch in April 2007. Groups of 20 or more and individuals who are part of a Fully Inclusive Tour will be able to discover the spectacular sights of London and its famous landmarks as they cruise along the Thames, aboard one of City Cruises' modern Riverliners. A visit to either Madame Tussauds or the Cabinet War Rooms then awaits. These two attractions are additions to the existing Cruise & Visit packages, which include the Tower of London and the London Eye.

New cruise-ferry for Brittany Ferries

Brittany Ferries has ordered a new £81 million 1,500-passenger cruise-ferry to be called 'Armorique' after the national park of outstanding beauty in western Brittany. The new vessel will be used solely on the Plymouth-Roscoff route and will come into service in the autumn of 2008.

Meanwhile, the leading operator on the western Channel is looking to promote Caen and Cherbourg as day trip destinations with a new range of 24-hour excursion fares for groups of ten or more passengers, with rates starting at just £8pp return. And, as a bonus for group organisers, coaches are carried free when there are more than 30 passengers, with a free berth and meals for the coach driver.

Special offers in Blackpool

Pleasure Beach, Blackpool, has a busload of special offers for coach and tour operators in 2007. Britain's top free tourist attraction with more than 125 rides and attractions plus shows, has a spectacular new ride – the suspended looping coaster Infusion – plus, for theatre fans, Forbidden – an untold fairytale.

Above: Austrian National Tourist Office chief executive, Petra Stolba, opens the show

Austrian Showcase

A new European showcase for tourism was born at the end of January when over 2,000 travel professionals gathered in Vienna for ACTB 07. The combined hospitality industry of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia hosted tour operators from around the world. *CBW*'s Michael Steed reports

The 80 or so British tour operators who headed for Vienna a few weeks ago knew that in general terms tourism from the UK to the central European countries of Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia was in good shape. All these countries were experiencing handsome annual increases in British tourists.

Lurking in the minds of the coach operators – which included Leger, WA Shearings and Travelsphere and coaching wholesalers Botel and Leisure Breaks – was that most of these additional visitors were arriving by low-cost airlines and not on coaches.

In the case of Austria, a bread-and-butter European destination for coach operators for the last 50 years, the increase in visitor numbers for the last five years has averaged over 5% annually, while coach arrivals were slightly down most years.

Unfortunately, this is the current trend for continental coaching holidays. There is, however, nothing specifically astray with the Austrian tour product. The lakes and mountains are as great as ever a magnet to visitors and with record levels of expenditure by the Austrians into their tourist industry, the infrastructure is constantly being improved and coach operators have few qualms about how their passengers are treated. Hotel prices remain realistic and the tour selling prices at home have not in general risen much above inflation levels in recent years.

The appeal of Austria is thankfully still strong and, while there has been this slight decrease in coach carryings, the demand is still good. This year about 100,000 British tourists will arrive there by coach. Apart from neighbouring Germany, only Holland sends more tourists to Austria than the UK.

As all British coach operators know, a strong factor in client satisfaction is the unique homely atmosphere of staying in an Austrian hotel. It is estimated that well over 90% of coach tourists stay in family-run hotels, whether pensions or four-star affairs.

The majority of the hotels have been handed down from one generation to another, gradually being extended and upgraded. "Each year we want our hotel to be more attractive to our visitors than last year," one Seefeld hotelier told me. "English guests want more comforts and facilities and we must provide them. Our three hotels have in the last 30 years all grown from pensions to four-star hotels and two of them have indoor swimming pools."

Evidence of British clients wanting higher standards is being proved by WA Shearings. They have introduced tours with the choice of either three-star or four-star accommodation in the same resort – and four-star are often outstripping three-star. That is why Sophie Cann, their product manager for Austria, was hoping at ACTB to sign up more four-star properties for 2008.

Heather Egerton, from Leisure Breaks, was another British buyer looking for more four-star Austrian properties for next year – as this is what her coach operator clients are now wanting.

The Austrian tourist authorities feel the small decline from British coach operators can be halted and praise those companies who have found new products. One example they point to are those who are now successfully featuring walking holidays. More operators could join them or update existing itineraries by incorporating leisure activities such as a gentle 'walking for softies' option. "Virtually every tourist office in our country could organise an English-speaking person to guide visitors on a casual walk, explaining points of interest and flora, etc, and making their stay more interesting," says Alois Muller, Austrian Tourist Office's London sales manager.

New product ideas

There has been a big increase in the number of British coaches in early December visiting the Christmas markets in Salzburg, Innsbruck and Rattenburg, apparently with good

payloads. This indicates there are opportunities for other operators to cash in by adding a new tour to their programme at a particularly quiet time of the year.

Compared with the Dutch and Belgians, British operators lag behind in 'winter wonderland' tours. This is another product that British coach operators could exploit.

In the spring and summer, 50% of all British coach passengers are based in the Tyrol, where in the winter larger resorts such as St Anton and Seefeld have numerous facilities and attractions available to occupy the time of non winter-sports visitors.

Should more operators follow the lead of WA Shearings, who are currently operating over 30 brochured 'winter wonderland' departures?

Another recommended themed tour is the Harvest Festival in Salzburgerland, the lower-lying Lake District area of Austria which is the base for nearly a quarter of all British coach operators' Austrian tourists.

Every September, the farmers dress up their cows and lead them down from the higher hills in preparation for the winter, in a colourful procession. There are associated village celebrations and, combined with visits to farmers' markets and the Salzburg Open Air Farm Museum, this provides an interesting itinerary for a Salzburgland early autumn tour. One coach wholesaler offering this package - and it is selling well - is Leisure Breaks (email: *groupsales@leisurebreaks.com*).

Above left: View of part of the main exhibition hall. Above right: Doing business at ACTB 07. Below: The splendour of Vienna's City Hall was the venue for a welcome dinner for over 800 visiting tour operators

Other themed and activity-based tour products which the Austrian suppliers at ACTB 07 were keen to promote, included 'spa and wellness' holidays. Austria now considers itself the top European country in this field. It is centred around four and five-star hotels and therefore possibly will only appeal to upmarket UK coach companies, but with the current high level of British interest in gyms and fitness, exhibitors were hoping to arouse interest with British tour operators. The sales manager of one Slovenian spa and thermal complex was excited at the booking results when recently exhibiting in a British 'wellness' and health farm show.

"There is definitely group potential from the UK," said Andrea Vacovnik of Zdravilisce Lasko thermal resort, following her few days in England. Her location is about an hour from Lake Bled and would offer massage and thermal treatment for a coach group 'optional' excursion (email. *Andreja.vavovnik@zdravilisce-lasko.si*).

Departing British delegates seemed well satisfied with business conducted and contacts made at the ACTB 07, but were disappointed at the small number of exhibitors from Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic who were obviously treating this expensive exhibition innovation with caution.

The showcase was dominated by Austria, but with 20 million visitors annually and tourism being the country's No1 industry, they had most to gain by hosting tour operators from around the world.

Briefly

It was interesting to note the large number of Chinese, South Korean and Russian participants at ACTB 07 in Vienna, indicating their countries' growing interest in western European destinations.

The Tirol Tourist Board held a special ceremony in Innsbruck's Olympic Stadium on the eve of ACTB to honour Dietere Eberie, the recently retired chief executive officer of British tour operator, Ingham's. They gave him their highest award for non-Tiroleans – the Tirolean Silver Order – for his services to tourism. Ingham's is the area's largest British operator, annually sending 50,000 tourists on summer and winter programmes.

When ACTB ended, a number of the British coach operators immediately departed for follow-up business in some of these neighbouring participating countries and felt that the contacts first made at ACTB with the Hungarian, Czech, Slovenian and Slovakian hoteliers and tourist offices had considerably helped them. These country's representative were small in number and British buyers hoped they would increase next year.

Four cities – Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt – together with four Swiss cities will stage the 2008 European football championships. It will create 4,000 new jobs and the TV exposure for Austria will be enormous, with the expected viewing figures exceeding eight billion! Some concern at ACTB was raised that British coach operators will experience a bed shortage in June 2008, but Austrian authorities say operators' allocations with their hotel and ground handling agents would be protected.

Following the success of the Mozart anniversary celebrations last year, plans are well advanced for celebrating in 2009 the 200th anniversary of the death of Viennese classic giant, Haydn.

Bournemouth's Queens Hotel was the venue for the 2007 CTC/BCH conference

Bournemouth Beckons

The speakers at last weekend's Coach Tourism Council conference were both entertaining and controversial. Andrew Peace reports.

Litigation

Delegates were regaled with a horror catalogue of holiday accidents by Alan Saggerson, a barrister specialising in Travel and Holiday law.

Tourists tripping over ancient stonework, or diving into empty swimming pools - there is "no accident so ludicrous that it couldn't happen to a British tourist, and there's no accident so small that it can't turn out to be expensive," says Mr Saggerson.

"If you take away nothing other than this, the first thing to do Monday morning is check you have personal injury liability insurance in place - believe me by the time I'm finished you'll want to make sure you have it," he says. Where operators see a bunch of happy holiday makers, he sees, "a pile of splintered hips at the bottom of a staircase."

All the cases he referred to relate to the Package Travel, etc, Regulations 1992 which defines a package holiday as 'pre-arranged accommodation, travel and other services sold together at an inclusive price'. Under this law, operators are 'liable for proper performance of the contract, and that reasonable skill and care will be exercised in its provision' and that includes the operator, the hotel and all facilities.

Another check for operators - do you have risk assessments for the places you visit and an accident response system?

Make sure, he says, that details of even the most trivial accidents are recorded at the time - they could well come back to bite you, years later.

Yet another check for operators. Do you have a clause in your accommodation contracts indemnifying you against the hotel's deficiencies, and does that clause say that all claims will be pursued in the UK, subject to UK laws? If it does then, and only then, he says, can you relax.

Trading standards

Bruce Treloar, principal Trading Standards Officer and the Trading Standards Institute's lead officer for the Holiday and Travel Industry, almost, provided some light relief following the carnage in Mr Saggerson's presentation.

Having said that, Trading Standards received over 20,000 complaints last year about holidays, the third largest category.

The subject is covered by a myriad of legislation so, a tip: due diligence - where you've taken every reasonable step to prevent something happening- is, he says, "your defence against anything we might want to enforce."

Two more tips: when making 'special offers' you must ensure that a 'reasonable number' - around 10% - of the products available are available at that price and, when having a sale, you display the previous price.

If in doubt he says, contact your local Trading Standards office for advice. As well as to referee between customers and suppliers, this is what they are there for he says.

Marketing

Ray Stenning, Best Impressions

Creating desire is the key to effective

marketing says Best Impressions' Ray Stenning. Sounds easy, but to do that you need to understand the marketplace, its hopes, needs and fears - what turns them on and off - and what emotional drivers lie behind the purchase of particular products.

Marketing done well can be a powerful tool - "We know how to get you so shit scared you'll buy anything," he says, referring to diarrhoea preventing pills that some people are too scared to leave the house without.

He wasn't there to teach delegates how to market services better as such, but to take a deeper look at the principles.

Best Impressions marketing and design agency has worked with many of the big players in the industry, from Stagecoach and First Group to Bakers Dolphin and Skills Holidays and Mr Stenning has a rich array of examples to draw on.

Two tips then from the master: 'Don't tell them what it does - tell them what they can do with it' and, 'Never underestimate the power of a brand. Building a powerful brand is one of the basic blocks of good marketing.'

Ken Robins, Excelsior Holidays

"I'm not controversial," said Ken Robins, boss of Excelsior Coaches, as he took to the stage. "I just say what I see."

Maybe not controversial, but certainly chilling if his next statement was anything to go by: "There are people out there, people like me, who are going to destroy the business of the traditional coach operator."

By people like him he actually meant the new generation of 'young' pensioners - he is sixty next month - the kind who wear jeans and dye their hair, ones that "understand the passage of time but do not like getting old - my generation will have go faster stripes on their stairlifts," he said.

Ken Robins provided much for the audience to think about

"If you present us with a product for an old person we won't buy it," he said, citing the crisis at Marks & Spencer when its association with the older market started to put younger customers off in the late 1990s.

This is obviously bad news for a sector like coach touring that relies on older customers, but what to do about it? Perception change marketing says Mr Robins, calling on the CTC and BCH to come together and collectively pay for a campaign to change consumer attitudes.

It is like the meat paste and pate argument he says - meat paste died the death in the 1970s to be replaced by pate. Essentially it is the same product but has vastly different perceptions in the market - one is a naff food stuff, the other a luxury desirable.

Something similar he says can happen in the coach touring industry. That will bring the coach tourism sector in line with the rest of the package holiday industry - spanning the entire age range of customers.

The audience had much to say at this point - but it seemed to be the hoteliers that were getting it in the neck rather than Mr Robbins (who, it has to be said is also a hotelier!). Elfyn Thomas, managing director of Silver Star Coach Holidays said it was the hotels that were often the problem - who wants to have to eat dinner in a group at 7pm he says, or breakfast at 9am? Alan Jones from Jones Motor Services agrees saying the hotel management is often not able to treat coach customers as individuals. Joanna Ames from Buzzlines says that UK hotels do not have the right sort of packaging for the late twenties age group, so she takes them to Europe.

Another operator chipped in to say that wholesalers were also to blame for rolling out the same old bingo and Christmas Carol trips every year.

Richard Eberhardt, Eberhardt Group

Boss of both the RDA - the International Coach Tourism Federation - and the Eberhardt Group, Richard Eberhardt brought some international perspective to the conference.

He also reeled off an array of statistics about the German coach market - the kind of statistics that are sadly currently unavailable to the UK industry.

German people take 64m holidays of over 5 days, split 70:30 abroad: home. Ten per cent of these are coach holidays, a proportion that has remained stable for 30 years. Rail holidays have decreased and flights have increased over this

period. In addition there are 15m short holidays and 100m occasional trips.

Germany has 1,000 coach operators, 300 regional market leaders, 100 local markets and 40 national players, feeding off 550,000 local clubs and societies. Numbers of holiday trips are stable, long haul trips are decreasing but city tours are buoyant.

Mr Eberhardt's 'family run, medium sized' group comprises four coach companies, two tour operators and three travel agencies in south west Germany. He employs 350 people and has over 100 vehicles, around a quarter of which are used on holidays.

It was established in 1931 by his father and passed onto him in 1975; it celebrated its 75th last year.

Barriers to success in the future are city access, parking fees, tour guide discrimination - a problem he expects to be solved in two years - and increasing long haul traffic congestion. The German government he says spends too much on railways and not enough on roads.

Passenger rights issues - newly emanating from the EU - over compensation for delays, etc, are another threat but cannot be right he says as all the other modes use separate infrastructure. There is a meeting with EU Commissioner Jacques Barrot on this and other subjects scheduled in March.

He echoed Ken Robins comments about the older generation and coach holidays. 57% of customers in Germany are over 55 years old, and tomorrow's will be quite different he says.

The RDA was established in 1951, and now has 3,000 members in 40 countries and in 80 tourism sectors. It opened an office in Brussels a few days ago. Mr Eberhardt also plugged the RDA Workshop in Cologne on August 7-9, with 1,500 exhibitors and 14,000 visitors.

Top: The scene in the conference room at Bournemouth. Middle: principal Trading Standards officer Bruce Treloar. Above: Best Impressions' Ray Stenning

Steven Dowd, UK Inbound

The UK tourism industry employs 2.2m people and is worth £74bn each year to the UK economy - but it won't last much longer says Steven Dowd, UKinbound chief executive, if it's left to this government.

The industry enjoyed 25 years of constant growth until 2000 and the foot and mouth crisis - which he didn't blame on Tony Blair - but nevertheless he says tourism in the UK is undervalued and underappreciated. "The government is fleecing our visitors and destroying our businesses," he says, especially with the extra tax levied on airline passengers in the latest budget, and the anti-plane attitude that is being allowed to develop.

Worse, VisitBritain has had no increase in its budget for the past ten years, a real terms decrease of 25% he says, and faces stiffer competition than ever from over 220 other nation destinations which is putting the consumer in the driving seat.

At least he has something to look forward to - the first British Tourism Week starts on March 12.

What did you think of the conference?

Mark Harbige, business development manager, VP Coaches, Croydon:
'I think it was good to see people thinking and talking about the other markets that coaches could be used in'
David Yard, Travel trade manager, Kew Gardens, Paul Follows, director, Grim's Dyke Hotel, London

Ian Hopkinson, partner, MB Law, Leeds, Bruce Treloar, principal Trading Standards Officer, Irena Jasinski, general manager, The Travel Advice Centre, London:
'Ken Robins hit the nail on the head. It was a difficult point to make but he put it over very well. Very relevant.'

Andrew Gazzi, Diamond Holidays
'Things are very buoyant at the moment, but it is always good to take a long term view.'
Hugh Davis, Diamond Holidays
'It must have stimulated everybody to think about what they need to do.'
Sally Jenkins, Stena Lines
'It's good to have some controversy!'
Siobhan O'Kane, CIE Tours
'I think Ken Robins generalised too much - there needed to be more of a healthy balance'
Marie McCarthy, Irish Ferries, Dermot Hogan, Tourism Ireland

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V Mercedes Sprinter 410. 61,000 mls. Automatic with 12/16 high-back seats, 4 point belts, carpet lined non-slip floor, side loading door. Unwin tracking and external tail-lift. Out of the box condition at £12,995.

Iveco 35 C11. Medium Wheel Base, high roof, Ricon internal tail-lift, 8 high-back seats in Moquette. Unwin tracking, with side loading door. £8,995.

X Renault Master Medium Wheel Base, 64,000 miles with Ricon internal tail-lift. Unwin tracking, 5 seats plus wheelchair spaces, unmarked paintwork, excellent value at £7,995.

W Volkswagen LT46, 16 high-back passenger seats with 3 point belts, fully carpet-lined, Unwin Tracking, external Ratcliff tail-lift, side loading door with cassette step, 40,000 mls. Paintwork is blue. A truly great example of excellent value at £10,995

52 Renault Master T35 Long Wheel Base, 8 high-back passenger seats, Ricon fully automatic interior stretcher full length tail-lift, side loading door with side step, lots of Unwin tracking. Unmarked paintwork. Great example at £9,495.

51 Iveco 50 C11. 16 high-back seats in moquette, four point belts, fully carpet-lined, non-slip floor, front lowered step entry with saloon heater, contrasting headlining, saloon speakers. Euroliners, Euromotive conversion, good value at £13,495.

52 Ford Transit Long Wheel Base. 17 seater, 59,000 mls. Full factory spec, central locking, tinted windows, a nice clean example of this popular minibus £10,750

02 Iveco 50 C11 Long Wheel Base, highroof, 16 highback passenger seats in moquette, all on Unwin tracking, fully carpet lined. Side loading door with pull out step. External PLS tail-lift. Good quality conversion, nicely priced at £13,995.

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2003 52 RENAULT MASTER

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2000 W REG VOLKSWAGEN LT46

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53 REG RENAULT MASTER

MM35 D, 2.5 ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 16,000 MILES ONLY.

S REG FORD TRANSIT 230

2.5 TD, MANUAL, P A S, LWB,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BUS, 12 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON 2030 TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY, ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY,

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53 REG FORD TRANSIT

53 REG,FORD TRANSIT BUS, 2.0 TD, MWB HIGH ROOF, PAS, 5 SPEED MANUAL GEARBOX, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS, FACTORY CONVERSION, 12 HIGH BACK SEATS. FULL AIR CON WHEELCHAIR FACILTY WITH RAMP , EX LOCAL OPERATOR ,110,000 MILES, FULL SERVICE HISTORY

2004 04 REG VOLKSWAGEN

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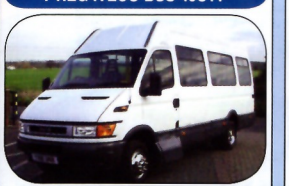
Y REG IVECO BUS 40C11



2.8 TD, LWB HIGH ROOF, PAS, 5 SPEED MANUAL GEARBOX, DIPTAC FRONT ENTRY DOOR, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION, 17 RESTCROFT SEATS. PURMO HEATER , EX LOCAL AUTHORITY,78,000 MILES, GOOD CONDITION,

53 REG RENAULT MASTER

SM33 D, 2.5 ,5 SPEED ,PAS, SWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER,

02 REG MERCEDES 614

02 REG MERCEDES 614 VARIO TURBO DIESEL AUTO TRANSMISION, 22 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. FRONT ENTRY POWER DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, MINIBUS OPTIONS CONVERSION EBERSPACHER HEATING, MINT CONDITION 72,000 KMS ONLY, CHOICE OF TWO.

T REG MERCEDES 814

T REG 1999 MERCEDES 814 VARIO TD, PAS, AIR SUSP, MOBILE OFFICE / COMMUNICATIONS UNIT, SEPARATE KITCHIN FITTED WITH MICROWAVE,SINK & FRIDGE, FULL AIR CON AND HEATING, SILENT RUNNING GENERATOR, ROOF ENTRY WITH SAFETY RAILS, AIR OPPERATED T/SCOPIC MAST,

51 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35 , 2.5DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH FOLD OUT STEP, 10 SEATS INC DRIVER PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIRS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 41,000 MILES ONLY.

M REG MERCEDES 709

M REG MERCEDES 709, CUNLIFFE CONVERSION, LONG WHEELBASE HIGH ROOF, 24 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS PLUS WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, FRONT ENTRY POWER DOOR WITH FOLD-DOWN STEP, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY

53 REG RENAULT MASTER MM35 D

2.5 ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 1 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN SOLO, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 30,000 MILES ONLY.

2003 52 REG RENAULT MASTER MM33

2.2 DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, MWB, HIGH ROOF, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS WITH AVS STEP, 8 + HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER OR 5 + 2 WHEELCHAIRS, RICON TAIL LIFT , UNWIN TRACKING, SILVER METALIC PAINT, ONE OWNER, 27,500M

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2001 Y REG MERCEDES 411 CDI

SPRINTER,DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, LWB, PAS, HIGH ROOF, SLD WITH FOLD OUT STEP,15 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR 5 W/CHAIRS, HEATER,RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER EX CHARITY, 75,000 MILES

99 V REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35 , 2.5DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 16 SEATS INC DRIVER, 1 WHEELCHAIR POSITION , UNWIN TRACKING, PORTARAMP, 59,000 MILES ONLY.

2001 Y REG VOLKSWAGEN

LT46 2.5DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, LWB, PAS, HIGH ROOF, AIR CON, SLD WITH AVS STEP,HEATER, 14 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR 5 W/CHAIRS, RICON INBOARD TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY AVERAGE 50,000 MILES CHOICE OF 5

2005 54 RENAULT MASTER LM39

2.5DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 14 SEATS, PLUS 3 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 17,000 MILES ONLY.

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04 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35 , 2.5DCI ,5 SPEED ,PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 3 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, E MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 47,000 MILES ONLY.

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R REG LDV CONVOY 2.5 DI TRANSIT ENGINE, LWB HIGH ROOF, PAS, 5 SPEED MANUAL GEARBOX, SIDE LOADING DOOR ,16 HIGH BACK ISRI SEATS FITTED WITH HEADREST AND SEAT BELTS, EX CHARITY 120,000 MILES part exchange to clear 2000-2002 FIAT / Ducatos 2.8 TD PAS, MOBILE OFFICE / CLINIC / TREATMENT CENTRE/ EXPO UNIT, SEPARATE KITCHIN FITTED WITH MICROWAVE,SINK & FRIDGE, FULL AIR CON AND HEATING, SILENT RUNNING GENERATOR, AWNING FITTED ON N/S,SECURITY ENTRY & ALARM SYSTEM, SIDE & REAR ENTRANCE DOORS WITH STEP AND RAMP AT REAR FOR WHEELCHAIR ACCESS, ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, ALL VERY LOW MILES,COST OVER £70,000 NEW .CHOICE OF 5

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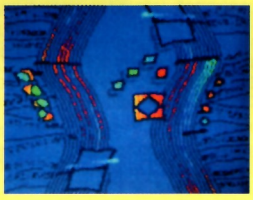

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2 x 2003/2002 Scania K114 Van Hool
3 x 1998/1994 Scania K113 Van Hool/Irizer
2 x 2000 Scania L94 Van Hool
5 x 2001/1998 Scania L94 Irizar

6 x 2003/1999 IVECO Beaulas
2 x 2000 Setra MAN
4 x 1998/1985 Leyland Tiger Paramount
2 x 1985/1981 Leyland Tiger Plaxton

PLUS 2005 BMW 523i SE AUTO

6 x 1996/1992 VOLVO B10M Plaxton
2 x 1990/87 VOLVO B9M Paramount
3 x 1992/1990 DAF SB3000 Plaxton
2 x 1993 DAF SB3000 Caetano

1 x 1996 Toyota Caetano 21 seat
1 x 1990 Mercedes 811D 25 seat
2 x 2004 Transit 17 seater
2 x 2003 LDV Convoy 17 seat

Please contact the office on **01630 674326** (fax 674356) **www.malcolmharrison.com**
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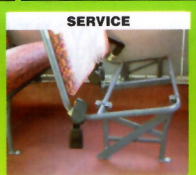

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Office Diary

From the editorial director's desk...

Monday: New recruit Gareth joins us today. He's most recently been driving buses for Tanat Valley in Wales. Madly keen! One of those daft press days where you can see the finishing line at about 5.00pm but don't actually cross it until 11.30!

Tuesday: Work into the evening and then head up the A1 to the Charnwood Hotel in Blyth. I'd booked it on the web based on its proximity to the A1 and Mentor in Hellaby. On arrival, it's locked and deserted. Bang on doors in the driving rain for 15 minutes until I give up and call 118 118 to get put through. "Oh sorry, we thought you weren't coming!". It's only 11.30!

Wednesday: To Mentor and chat to marketing man Griff Jackson-Irving. I spy the striking new MAN Noge Catalan and take pics. A steady stream of operators come to look at the Mentor line-up. Driving back down the A1 I pass the Welsh's Tours' Setra S416GT-HD (W25 HOL) that had been on the front cover of *CBW* a couple of weeks ago. And very smart it looked too, glinting in the sun.

Thursday: A day in the office trying to write stuff. And then to London to see Evita at the Adelphi, my Xmas present from my brother. Not really big into musicals, but I'd thoroughly recommend this revival to operators.

Friday: To a Carrier Sutrak conference on air-conditioning in Northampton. Andy Peace is covering for me at the BCH/CTC conference in Bournemouth. An hours delay on the M1 for a crashed caravan, break the petrol flap on my car at a garage and my front tyre blows out in Northampton. Carrier boss Peter Adams emails and hopes I had an uneventful journey back. I can't speak!

Unused bus lane at Middleton: should open later this year (we hope)

Lane still waiting for its first bus – 18 months on

We found another example of an unused bus lane this week, this time in Middleton. The marked bus lane, which should run into the modernised station has never been used in 18 months since it was built.

Traffic lights which will allow buses to easily pull into the station have been covered ever since the multi-million pound site was officially opened in July 2005. At the moment, buses have to circle the station to drop off and pick up passengers at the correct stands.

GMPTE's interim projects director, Paul Griffiths, told local press: "It has always been our aim to have a second entrance to Middleton bus station to make it easier for buses. We hope that buses will be able to use the new entrance later this year."

Googled...

http://www.psvdrivers.com

PSV drivers, as the name might suggest, is intended to be a one-stop shop for professional bus and coach drivers. The excellent site contains a wealth of information, including anecdotes and humour as well as facts about training, understanding drivers' hours regulations and the responsibilities of a driver. One of the site's creators told *CBW*: "The original idea was a site that drivers could log onto, keep up to date without having to navigate their way through the complex VOSA website and generally bring drivers together."

Bus rushes passenger to hospital

A bus driver turned his single decker into an ambulance when a passenger fell ill and had to be rushed to hospital. Emergency staff at London's Queen Elizabeth Hospital were surprised when the 108 bus pulled up outside A&E and a 34-year-old man was rushed in.

The driver made the swift detour from his usual route after an ambulance failed to arrive within 20 minutes of his 999 call.

The driver realised the passenger was suffering from a fit as the bus pulled up outside Westcombe Park police station. An officer went to assist, but as the ambulance was delayed he asked the driver to take the man to the hospital in Stadium Road, leaving the other passengers in Westcombe Hill.

The East Thames bus was on route from Stratford to Lewisham, and is operated by TfL. A spokeswoman said: "We are extremely proud of the driver's actions to save one of his passengers."

A hospital spokesman added: "It was definitely a first for us and it turned a few heads to see a 108 coming down Stadium Road!"

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A sign of the times? This notice was captured on the side of a bus in the West Midlands. We could not help but smile, but on a serious note perhaps it is an indication of how rampant the litigation culture has become. One cannot help but wonder if the operator hopes the sign will make any such claims open and shut cases...

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